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79th Inf Div

Hagerman Sector

9-20 Jan 45

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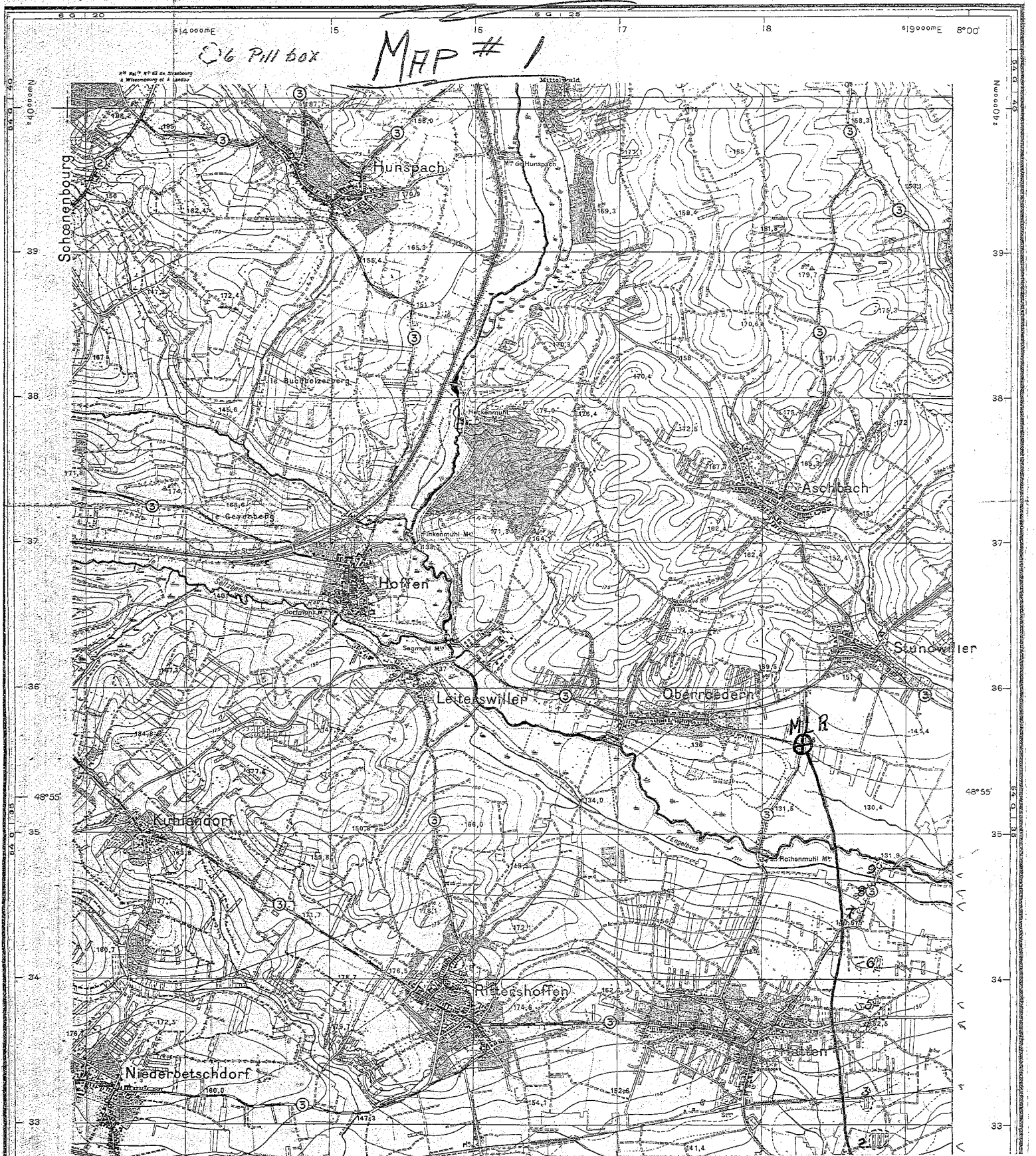
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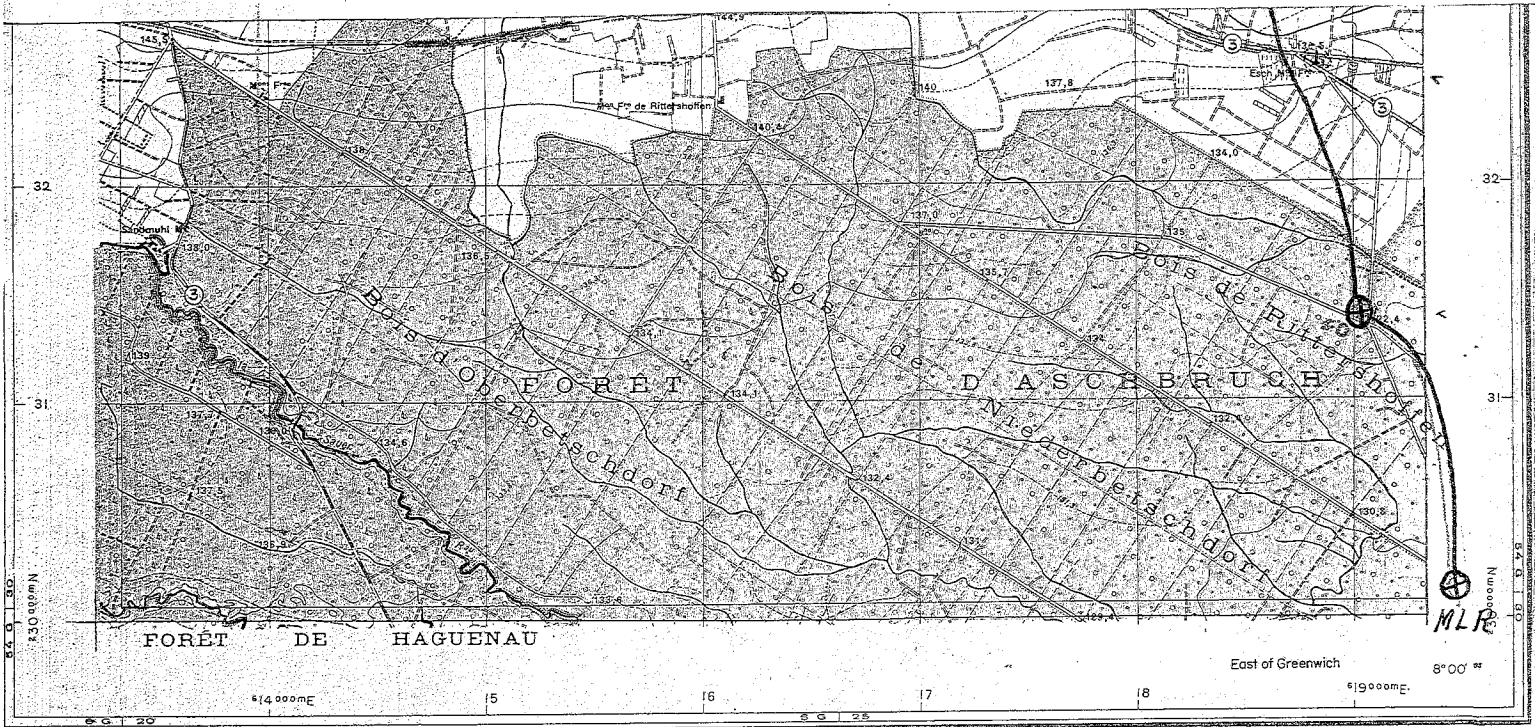
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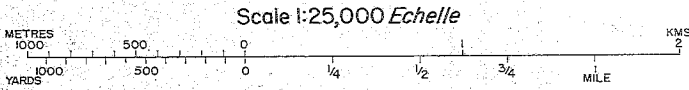


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Geographical Section, General Staff No.4411
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7th Army 1944, from Original French 1:20,000 map
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This sheet has been compared with recent aerial photographs
and has been found to be up-to-date.
*Cette feuille a été comparée avec des récentes photographies
aériennes et a été trouvée mise à jour.*



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at 12-55

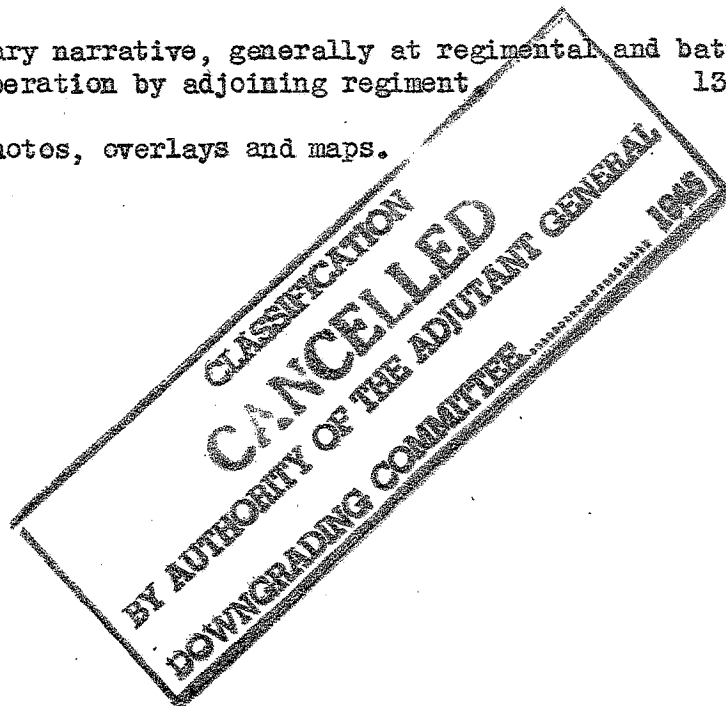
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79th Inf Div
Hagenail Sector
9-20 Jan 45

- a. A remarkably detailed, thorough and graphic story of winter fighting against strong enemy attacks. Historical officer's narrative, based on a large number of interviews, concerning principally the prolonged stands of two isolated battalions. Clear and comparatively complete story of the whole course of the battalions' engagements, with a wealth of combat detail down to individual actions. 114 pages
- b. Supplementary narrative, generally at regimental and battalion level, of similar operation by adjoining regiment 13 pages
- c. Numerous photos, overlays and maps.



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HEADQUARTERS SEVENTH ARMY
HISTORICAL SECTION
APO 758 U S ARMY

AG 314.7-H

22 May 1945

SUBJECT: Evaluation of Historical Material.

TO : Commanding Officer, 315th Infantry Regiment, APO 79, U.S. Army.
(Through: Commanding General, 79th Infantry Division,
APO 79, U.S. Army.

1. The attached draft was written from notes taken during interview with officers and enlisted men of the units concerned, by a representative of the Seventh Army Historical Section. This information is being obtained in order to procure detailed reports on key actions for the Seventh Army historical records.

2. In order to check the accuracy of the Historical Section in recording these accounts, it is requested that the inclosed draft be examined, and that corrections, criticisms, or comments be forwarded to the Historian, Seventh Army, by indorsement hereon.

William B. Goddard
WILLIAM B. GODDARD,
Lieut Colonel, Inf,
7th Army Historian.

1 Incl:
Draft, "Hatten and Rittershoffen, 79th Infantry Division, 1-20 Jan 45.

1st Ind.
HQ 315TH INFANTRY, APO 79, U. S. Army, 26 June 1945.

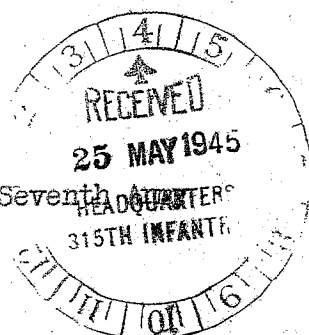
TO: Commanding Officer, Historical Section, Headquarters Seventh Army,
APO 758, U. S. Army

Deficiencies noted, reference attached report.

For the Commanding Officer:

Charles A. Riegler
CHARLES A. RIEGLE,
Captain, 315th Infantry,
Adjutant.

1 Incl
Report of deficiencies.



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C O R R E C T I O N S

1. Following comments are made concerning draft of "Hatten and Rittershoffen". All comments refer to page numbers in Rittershoffen section.

2. Page 4, line 21. This should be TD's instead of tanks. These were the only self-propelled guns which were attached to, and which the Battalion had control over at this time. It is pointed out that the principal avenue of approach used by enemy tanks was along the low ground following this creek line from which the TD's were withdrawn. This continued to be true throughout the action.

3. Page 5, line 6 to 17. The statement in this paragraph that "The troops in the defensive position on the eastern outskirts of Rittershoffen were taken completely by surprise" is not true. Please refer to statement of Pvt J. Wesley Nippert, Co "L", in footnotes on pages 45 and 46. Refer also to statement of Capt Goranson in paragraph 4 of this letter. Patrols had been sent out throughout the night toward the East, Northeast, and North. Last patrol report prior to the attack was at 0650. Entry in Battalion Journal follows: "0650--"K" Co patrol negative. Searched houses and received only Arty fire". Lt Col Thomas K. Eason.

4. Page 11, last line. The crew of this gun was awake and fired one round. I personally woke them at 0530, and Lt Perrault checked about 0630. Capt Goranson.

5. Foot note 1, page 12. The AT gun referred to was definitely a gun of 242nd Infantry. The original line established by Co "I" on 10 January was built around it. It was in the platoon sector of Lt Frank R. Perrault, and he talked to members of the crew during the time his platoon was digging in. Capt Goranson.

This is true as none of the three Battalion AT guns were in position north of the Hatten-Rittershoffen road. One was in position near this road, and the other two were covering the approaches from the south-east into Rittershoffen.

6. Page 12. All calls for artillery fires, ~~LT~~ shelter were made over SCR 300 belonging to Co "I", and most of these calls were made by Capt Goranson. Lt Col Eason

7. Page 14, line 20. This should be 2000, instead of 1000.

8. Page 15, line 15. Capt Goranson returned to the 3rd Battalion CP, rather than the Regtl CP. The two man patrol which was mentioned accompanied Capt Goranson, rather than preceding him, from the shelter and led the carrying party back to bring out the wounded. Lt Col Eason.

9. Page 33, lines 19 and 20. The Germans did not man this TD. It was withdrawn later that night by men of the 14th Armd, dispatched for this purpose by 3rd Bn after information was received from Capt Goranson. Lt Col Eason.

10. Page 54, line 6 to 8. The American tank was not lost during the withdrawal. This happened two days previous when a tank was being taken out of town to be replaced by another.

11. Page 10, line 1. T Sgt Duncan was wounded and captured according to reports received 1 June 1945. Major Miller.

12. Page 20, line 8. While telephone communications were disrupted SCR 300 contact was maintained throughout the entire fight. Major Miller.

13. Page 50, line 5. Lt Shirley and Lt Harrall were killed. Doyle is very much alive. Major Miller.

14. Page 50, line 17. Lt Putman was mortar section leader and not the platoon leader.

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15. Page 54, li 5. Capt John E. Potts not "Robert G". Major Miller.

16. Page 21, line 22. Should be "Rittershoffen" instead of "Niederbetsch-
 dorf". Major Schriewer.

17. The I & R and the attached group of cooks plus the Mine Platoon of the
AT Co contacted the 3rd Battalion near the apex of the "triangle" and were to form
 an outpost line to the RR Sta, due to enemy in the vicinity. Again on the night
 of the 12th (Page 28) Lt Holly drew fire from this area when attempting to take
 supplies to Hatten. Thereafter, only occasional patrols visited the area.
 Major Schriewer.

18. Page 37, Note 2. They were not fired. Major Schriewer.

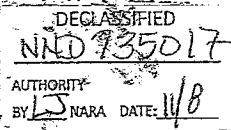
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1. Aerial photograph of Hatten and Rittershoffen.
2. Extract from 15th Corps and 79th Division, G-3, overlays, 9 January 1945.
3. Sketch of Hatten.
4. 1/25,000 map of the Hatten and Rittershoffen area.
5. Sketch of Rittershoffen.
6. Rittershoffen (Approximate situation 13 January 1945).

Added

- a. Troops move on Rittershoffen.
- b. The Hatten Railroad Station.
- c. The church at Hatten.
- d. Part of the enemy held Northwest portion of Hatten.
- e. The railroad tracks between Hatten and Rittershoffen.
- f. The prisoner of war cage marking the supply trail.
- g. The church and cemetery at Rittershoffen.

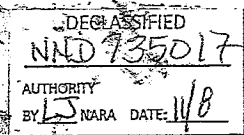


INTRODUCTION

The material for this small unit action study was obtained as the result of a 12 day visit with the 315th Infantry Regiment, 79th Infantry Division, 24 January 1945 to 5 February 1945. During this period the regimental CP was located at Weitbruck, France. The situation was relatively static ~~in~~ ^{by} comparison with what it had been at Hatten and Rittershoffen.

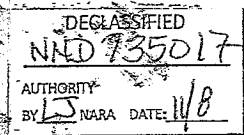
The method employed in gathering information for the story was to progress in order from the regimental down to the company level conducting interviews with staff officers, company commanders, and other company officer and enlisted personnel. While talking to regimental and battalion staff officers ~~only~~ fragmentary notes were taken. The writer interpolated questions whenever necessary to get first a reasonably well reconstructed general picture of the action. In the discussions with the company commanders, however, statements were taken almost verbatim. In order to preserve more nearly the true continuity of the story, these officers were interrupted as little as possible during their recitation. After relating his account, each company commander was questioned relative to any obtuse statements he might have made. Names were then rechecked and casualty figures obtained if possible. At this point platoon leaders ^{and enlisted men} were called in individually for their statements.

Great difficulty was encountered in trying to piece together



the stories of the 315th Regiment in Hatten and Rittershoffen. This was true for several reasons: (1) the action lasted for ten days and most of it was the bitterest of in-town fighting; (2) all three battalions of the regiment were involved; and (3) in addition to miscellaneous attachments, sizeable elements of two divisions other than the 79th were taking part in the fighting in the towns. In order to have told the real story of Hatten and Rittershoffen, accounts should have been obtained from the other participating units. Since this was not done, some ambiguity has resulted as to the employment of supporting elements such as tanks, tank destroyers, and self-propelled artillery. Vehicles and crews of these types of war machines figured prominently in the action and hence the story is deficient to the extent that due recognition is not extended them.

Another ^{problem} was the fact that the material was solicited *quite* ~~too soon~~ within a very few days after the battles took place. Normally this would be a distinct advantage, but in this case it is believed that better results might have been obtained a week or ten days later. Even though two weeks had already elapsed, the men and officers were still exhausted from their ordeal. Being continually on the line since, the troops had had no opportunity to rest. Contrary to usual experience, the writer found a number of key individuals who were reluctant to talk about the affair. Consequently sketchy and poorly integrated accounts were obtained from some of them while from others,

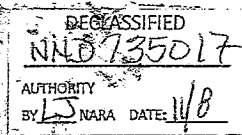


less tired and less mentally upset, full and detailed statements were received. The net result is a certain amount of distortion which could only have been overcome by allotting more time for the project and talking to more people. This was not ^{practicable} possible under the circumstances.

Because of extenuating circumstances it was not possible for the writer to stay with the 315th Infantry Regiment while completing a "first" draft of the story, but a return visit was contemplated which would have offered the opportunity of checking the manuscript for inaccuracies. Unfortunately the 79th Division was moved to another Army in the interim and this was not done.

In spite of its shortcomings the story of the "Battles for Hatten and Rittershoffen" is thought to be a reasonably accurate portrayal of a vitally important action - especially in its broader aspects. Carried to its logical conclusion a small unit action would account for every significant individual act. While some individuals and unit elements may have cause to feel slighted because mention is not made of them, it is questionable whether such completeness would enhance the historical value of this document or its readability.

Keith K. Eggers
KEITH K. EGGERS
Capt., Hist Sect
Hdqs, Seventh Army



With the 79th
INFANTRY DIVISION
At HATTEN and RITTERSHOFFEN

Hatten and Rittershoffen are the shambles of two once pretty little Alsatian towns. Nobody lives there. Nobody would want to live there now. Yet officers and men of the 79th Infantry Division fought ten bloody days for their possession in one of the most critical actions in 7th Army history. For strategical reasons the piles of rubble were turned back to the enemy who had paid such a dear price for them. We paid a terrific price too - in men, blood, and material. Not for two piles of rubble, but for the last punch out of the German threat to retake Alsace Lorraine.

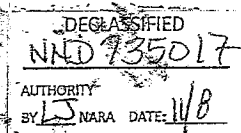
The first of the year, 1945, had found the 79th Infantry Division holding a sector along the Lauter River to which line it had fallen back after previous attempts, with modest success, to penetrate the Siegfried Line. On New Year's Day the enemy launched a strong attack, which was thought to be backed by a sufficiently large number of troops to warrant the withdrawal of the 79th Division to a more tenable position. The Maginot Defenses were chosen for this purpose and accordingly the 79th Division and attached units withdrew to a line which extended roughly from below Gleebourg on the left flank, below Ingolsheim and Aschbach to the southeast, and to a point about a mile east of Hatten. From there it extended southward in the direction of Sessenheim to tie on to the Rhine River

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AERIAL PHOTOGRAPH OF HATTEN AND RITTERSHOFFEN



Fig. 1.



below the town. (See figure 2).

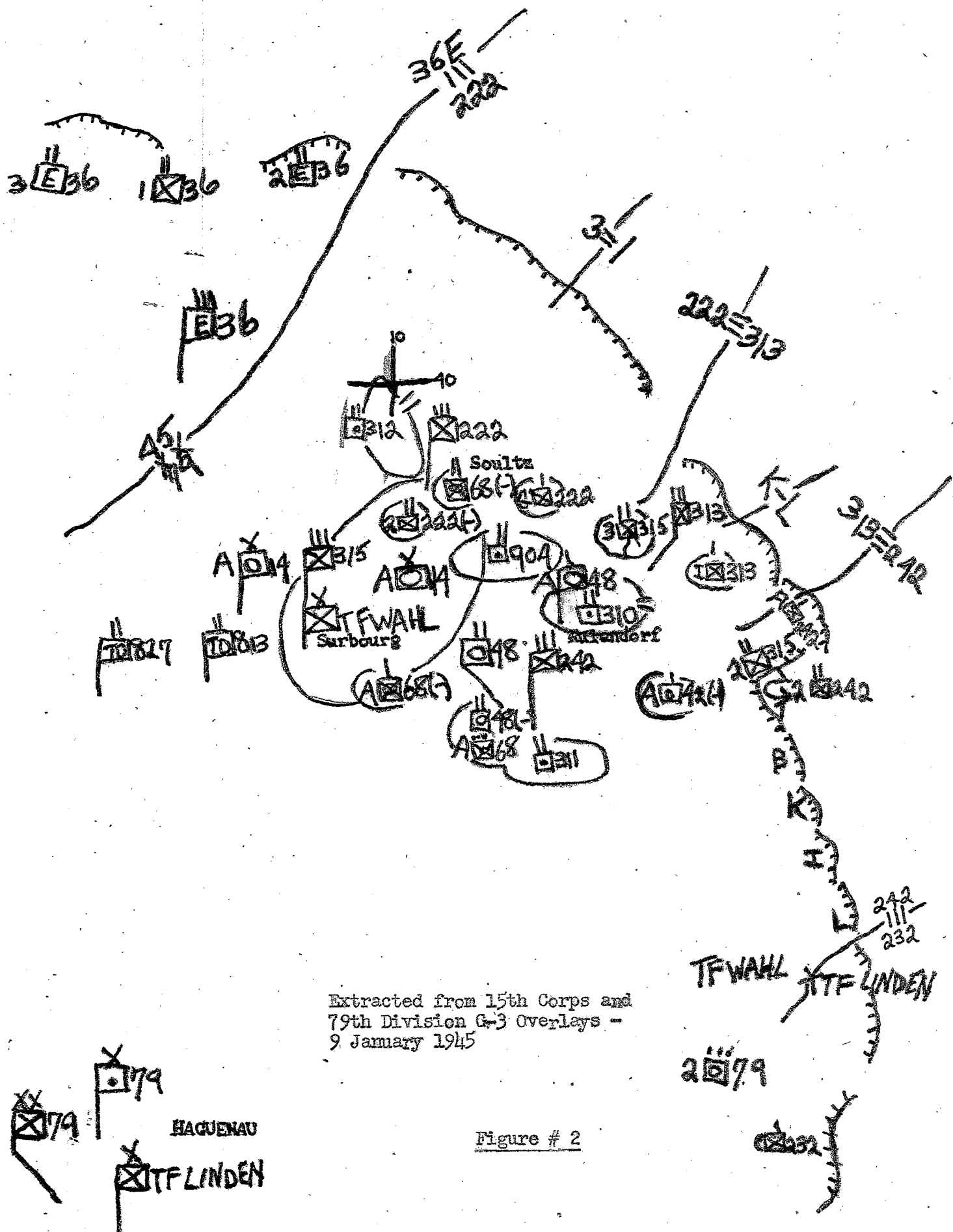
The 7th of January found the 242nd Infantry Regiment of the Task Force Linden (42nd Infantry Division) under Brigadier General Henning Linden, Assistant Commanding General, 42nd Infantry Division, holding the sector east of Hatten with a line extending from about a mile south of Stundwiller to Koenigsbruck. The 313th Infantry Regiment held a narrow front running roughly a mile west and between the towns of Hunsbach and Hoffen. The 222nd Infantry Regiment (42nd Infantry Division) held the remainder of the Division front to the north. Other elements from both divisions were in position along the Rhine River to the south.

After the attachment of the Linden Task Force (42nd Infantry Division) composed of three organically unsupported infantry regiments to the 79th Infantry Division, the resulting unwieldiness indicated the wisdom of dividing the command. On the day of the 7th of January the force was divided essentially into three parts: (1) the 3rd Battalion, 313th Infantry Regiment, the 222nd Infantry Regiment (less the 2nd Battalion),

¹
The Linden Task Force was the name originally given to the three organically unsupported infantry regiments of the 42nd Infantry Division. During this period the name was applied to elements under General Linden's command, some from the original Linden Task Force and some not.

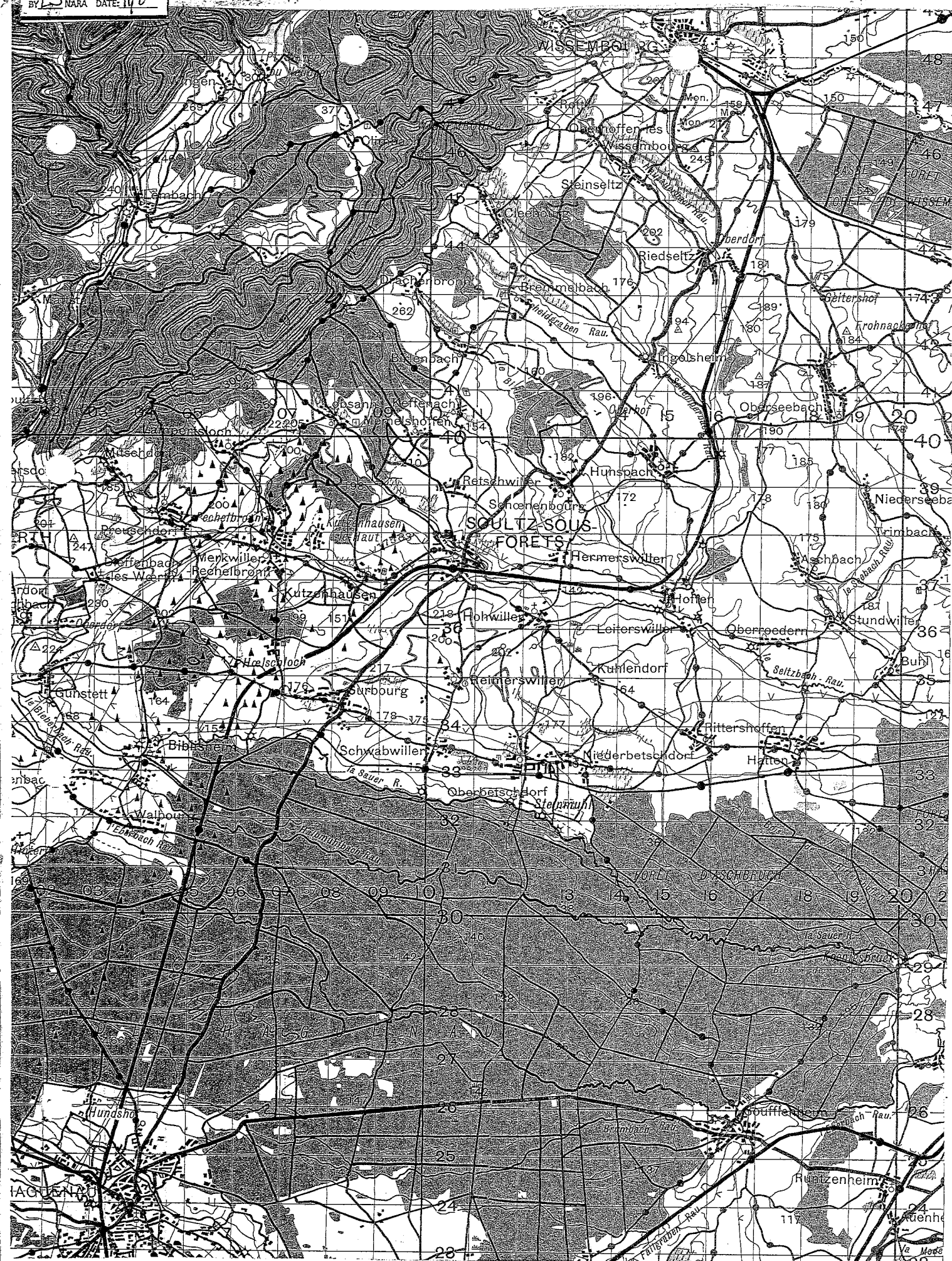
²
G-3 Report, 79th Infantry Division.

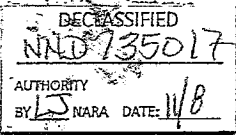
³
Sgt. - - Wolfe, Historian, 79th Infantry Division. The infantry elements had been sent into action prior to the arrival in France of the supporting elements.



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and the 315th Infantry Regiment (less the 1st Battalion) under Brigadier General George D. Wahl, Assistant Division Commander, 79th Infantry Division, and collectively known as the Wahl Task Force; (2) the 314th Infantry (less the 1st Battalion)(later, on the 9th, attached to the Task Force Linden for one day only) which was directly under 79th Division control; and (3) remaining elements of the Task Force Linden under General Linden. Four battalions of Infantry from the 79th Infantry Division were on loan to the 45th Infantry Division: the 1st and 2nd, 313th Infantry Regiment, and the 1st Battalion of both the 314th and the 315th.⁴

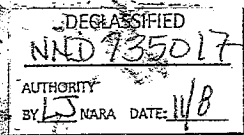
General Wahl was apprehensive of the possibility of a strong enemy attack in his sector. He at first thought it might come from the direction of Wissembourg. Intelligence sources indicated that a strong concentration of enemy troops⁵ were assembling in that general area. Both the 3rd Bn, 313th Infantry, and the 222nd Infantry (less the 2nd Battalion) which were on line during the day of the 7th received attacks in the nature of probing thrusts. General Wahl held the 315th Infantry (less the 1st Battalion) in reserve, prepared to counter any breakthrough on the front of the 222nd Infantry

4

G-3 Report, op. cit.

5

Brigadier General George D. Wahl, Assistant Division Commander, 79th Infantry Division. Interviewed at 79th CP at Schwindratzheim, France, 1500, 31 January 1945.



or the 3rd Battalion, 313th Infantry. To strengthen his position, CCA, 14th Armored Division (of which the 48th Tank Battalion was a part) and the 827th TD Battalion was attached to his force.⁶

General Wahl's reserve forces were all assembling in the general area of the Soultz-Surbourg-Kuhlendorf triangulation with the CCA, 14th Armored Division, the 3rd Battalion, 315th Infantry, and the 2nd Battalion, 222nd Infantry, all in the vicinity of Soultz to forestall an attack from the north.⁷

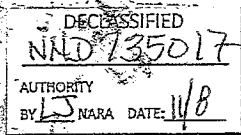
Again on the 8th the enemy made another thrust, this time with 10 tanks and a company of infantry against the 3rd Battalion, 313th Infantry. The assault, which was repulsed, came from the vicinity of Stundwiller and indicated that possibly the big attack, when it came, might come from the east or northeast into a point below Hoffen. The many stream crossings required between Wissembourg and Soultz and the fact that the enemy was known to be assembling troops in Oberseebach supported this new premise.⁸

The attack that finally broke through, was launched against neither the 222nd Infantry nor the 313th Infantry, but farther south through the 1st Battalion, 242nd Infantry, in the vicinity of Hatten. Although the 242nd Infantry

⁶
G-3 Report, op. cit.

⁷
General Wahl, - supra.

⁸
Ibid.

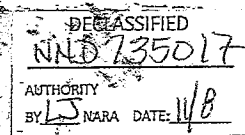


was not a part of the Wahl Task Force at the time, the attack was temporarily stopped by CCA of the 14th Armored Division, which had been attached to General Wahl's command for the purpose, and the 2nd Battalion, 242nd Infantry, which fortunately had assembled in the vicinity of Rittershoffen the day previous. Company A, 48th Tank Battalion (CCA) and the 2nd Battalion, 242nd Infantry, pushed the invading force back to Hatten knocking out six enemy tanks. Soon thereafter the 2nd and 3rd Battalions, 315th Infantry Regiment, were moved to Rittershoffen and Hatten respectively to be in positions to assist the 242nd Infantry should help in that direction be required.⁹

These, very briefly, were the steps leading up to the "battles of Hatten and Rittershoffen." Though the 242nd Infantry was not under his command at the time of the breakthrough and though the 14th Armored Division controlled its own elements later when it was given the mission of breaking up the enemy attack and restoring the original main line of resistance, General Wahl continued to coordinate the efforts of the units involved and his task force played a very considerable part in the action. Because of the nature of the affair which tended to create two isolated battles (in spite of the fact that the two towns are only about a mile apart and that they were both involved in one much larger operation), to avoid confusion the following account is essentially

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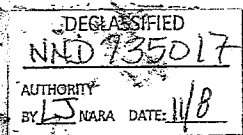
G-3 Report, op. cit.



divided into two parts namely: the "Battle of Hatten" and the "Battle of Rittershoffen."

Though the 10th of January has been referred to as the first Hatten day, the "Battle of Hatten" really began on the 9th when the 2nd Battalion, 315th Infantry, moved into the town of Rittershoffen. (See figure 23 ^{2nd figure d.)} The day's significant action started when two German battalions of infantry and two tanks took two key Maginot pillboxes from which the 242nd Infantry Regiment was defending northeast of Hatten. Prior to the assault heavy artillery concentrations were laid on both the towns of Rittershoffen and Hatten. Then an attack was launched by two battalions of the 25th Panzer Grenadier Division and about 100 vehicles, 50 of which were combat vehicles. This attack was opened with 16 tanks approaching Hatten from the southeast, followed at a short distance by 17 personnel carriers. After breaking through the MLR, the enemy proceeded into the eastern edge of Hatten.

Another group of 15 tanks approached Hatten from the northeast. Some tanks attempting to approach Rittershoffen were taken under fire, by the 14th Armored Division and most of them destroyed. In the process, however, Company C of the 242nd Infantry Regiment was pushed back into Hatten. Companies A and B held their original lines, but after dark, the main line of resistance, not as yet restored, the companies on either side fell back on a line with C Company. Isolated elements of the 242nd Infantry Regiment including two



TROOPS MOVE ON RITTERSHOFFEN



Seventh Army Infantrymen march toward Rittershoffen to stem the threatened enemy breakthrough. These may be men of the 315th.

Fig. a.

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battalion CP's were in danger of being surrounded in Hatten.¹⁰
 This attack was staged by the 25th Panzer Grenadier Division, some elements of which at least, had taken a circuitous route into the sector to make a surprise attack from the east. The routes followed by these elements were over roads from Bitcher through Wissembourg, Niederlauterbach, Neewiller, Niederroedern and on to Hatten.¹¹ About 1300 the enemy staged the last attack prior to the arrival of the 2nd Battalion of the 315th Infantry Regiment on the scene.

These assaults were being made by troops of different caliber from those that the 79th Infantry Division, less than two months before, had pushed from this very same soil. These German soldiers were big - obviously not boys - and fought like the veterans they were. Infantry supported by tanks was the basis for most of the thrusts. Tanks and infantry seemed to work in perfect unison. Recovery of knocked out vehicles and troop casualties, American as well as German, was a constant source of amazement. And what tenacity. It was quite common, for instance, for enemy crews to hold out in or behind their demolished vehicles until the bitter end.¹²

¹⁰

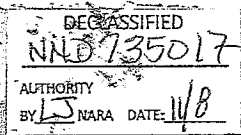
T/Sgt Same B. Lyons, PRO Section, 79th Infantry Division. Interviewed at 79th Division CP at Schwindratzheim, 25 January 1945 and 315th Infantry Report.

¹¹

A PW statement found in Journal of the 315th Infantry Regiment.

¹²

Lyons, supra.



The staff of the 2nd Battalion, 315th Infantry Regiment, was just beginning the noon meal, 9 January, when orders were recieved for the battalion to move to Rittershoffen and to be prepared to assist the 1st and 2nd Battalions of the 242nd Infantry Regiment. ¹³ After the move to Rittershoffen things quieted down and it was not until 2100 that the Battalion received further orders to move two companies into Hatten to restore the former MLR. Companies F and G each with a section of Company H machine guns attached were selected for the mission with Company E and Company H (less 1 platoon) ¹⁴ to be held in battalion reserve in Rittershoffen.

Prior to the 2nd Battalion's being hurriedly thrown in to breach the gap in the line, tanks, as has been stated, from the 48th Tank Battalion had been supporting the 242nd Infantry Regiment. As he was given his mission, Lt. Col. Earl F. Holton, commanding the Battalion, had been informed that there were tanks from this unit in position both north and south ¹⁵ of Hatten. He had further been instructed that the tanks

¹³

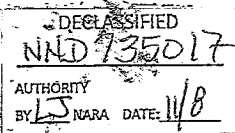
The 242nd Regimental CP was in Rittershoffen.

¹⁴

1st Lt. James R. Sessions, Battalion S-1. Interviewed at Bn CP at Marienthal, France, 1500, 27 Jan 45. One Section of Company H machine guns were attached to each of the two companies. One section went in the next day with Company E and at the same time one mortar section was sent in and set up near Company G with an OP in the Company CP building. The remaining section of MGs and two sections of mortars were sent into Hatten a day later as replacements.

¹⁵

Lt Col Earl F. Holton, Bn Comdr, 2nd Bn, 315th Infantry. Interviewed at Bn CP at Marienthal, France, 1500, 27 January 1945.



would be relieved that night by tank destroyers from the 728th Tank Destroyer Battalion which would take up positions similar to those the tanks were thought to be holding.¹⁶

Assuming the information given him to be correct, Colonel Holton made plans to use the tanks as strong points to which he could tie the new line. Accordingly he instructed Company G to contact the tank group south of the town and form a defensive line between them and the 1st Battalion CP of the 242nd Infantry. (At the school house. See Figure 3). The tanks were supposed to be in the outskirts of the town while the CP was very close to the center of the east end of the town. Likewise he directed Company F to contact the tanks, supposedly 200-300 yards north of town on the road which runs in the general direction of Stundwiller, and follow the same procedure as G. Colonel Holton visualized a "Y" shaped line anchored at either end to strong points - a line which might gradually work itself taunt, advancing and straightening the main line of resistance.¹⁷

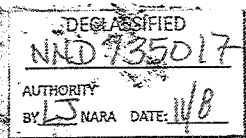
As a precaution Captain Ralph D. Shrewsbury, CO, Company G, dispatched a 20 man patrol to contact the tanks. This was a fortunate decision because instead of finding freindly tanks, the patrol stumbled into an enemy trap near the railroad station south of Hatten. (see fig. B.) Allowing the patrol to come within 10 yards of their position, the enemy opened up with

16

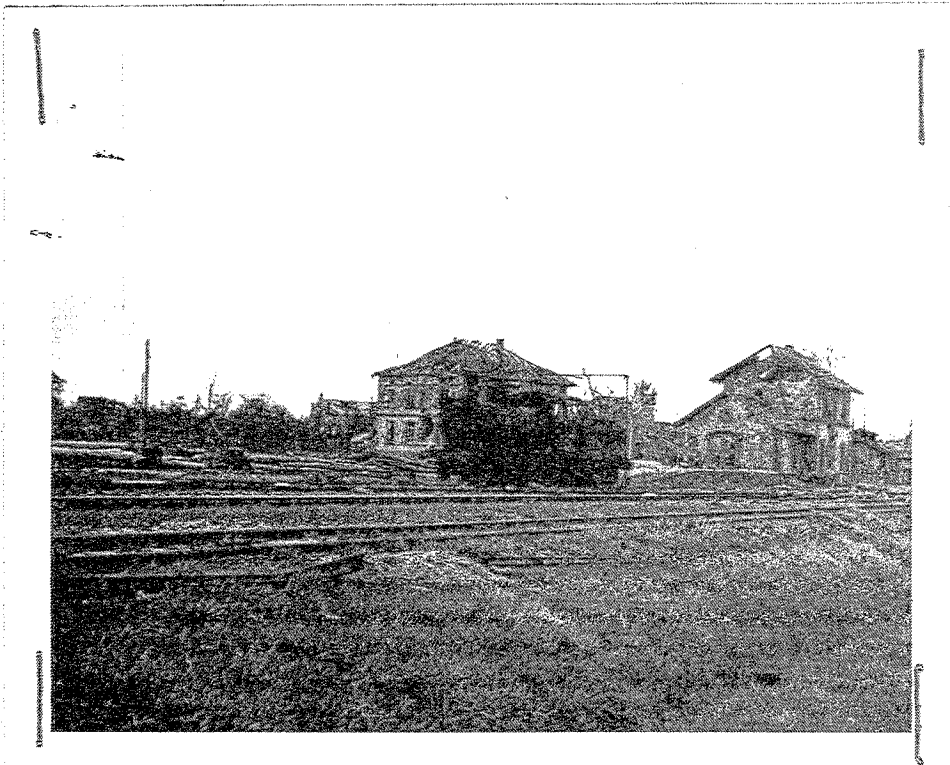
Regt Journal, op. cit.

17

Col. Holton, supra.



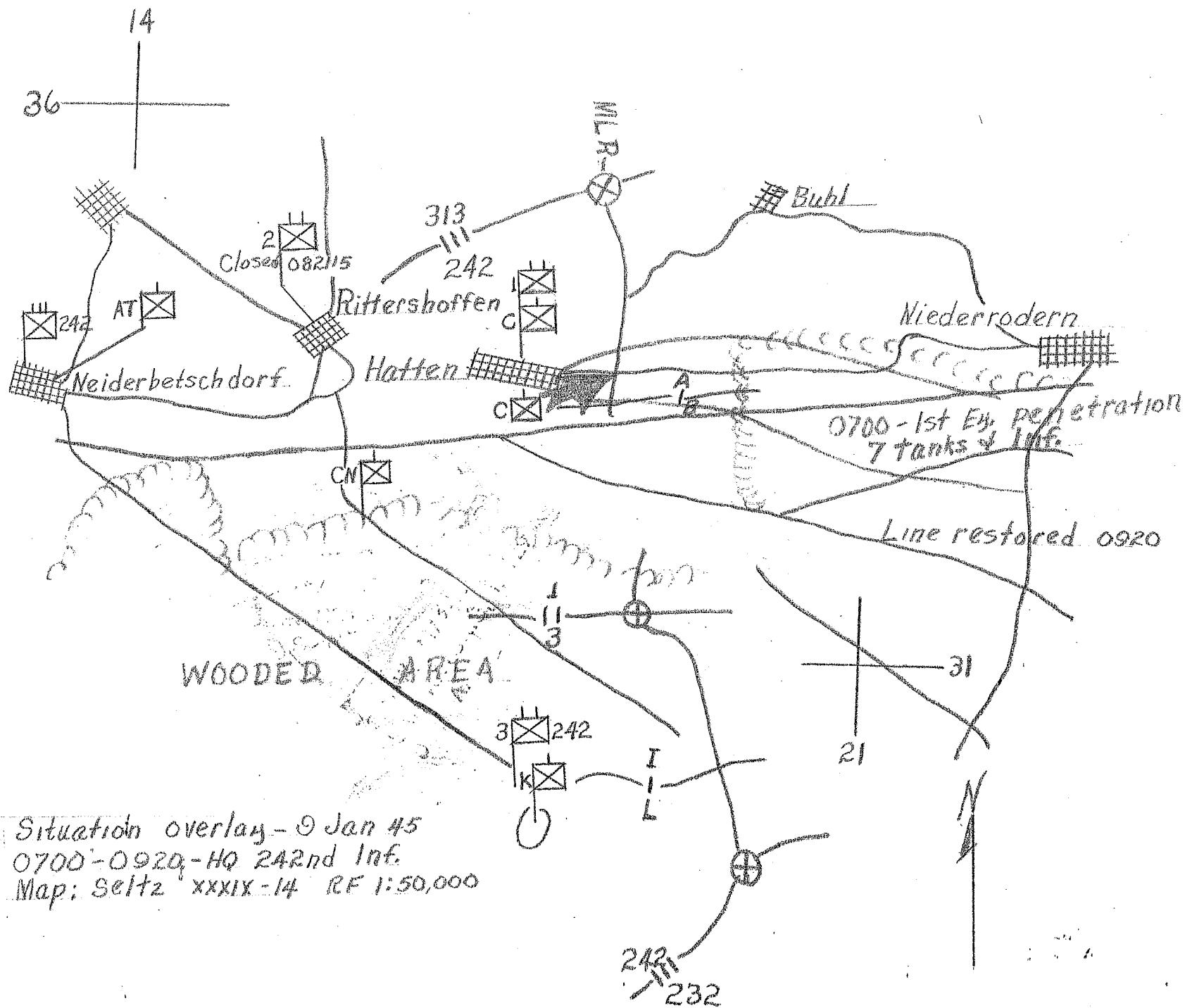
THE HATTEN RAILROAD STATION



Looking at the town of Hatten from Northwest of the Hatten station. It was here that the G Company 20 man patrol stumbled into an enemy trap.

Fig. b.

OVERLAY
No. 2.



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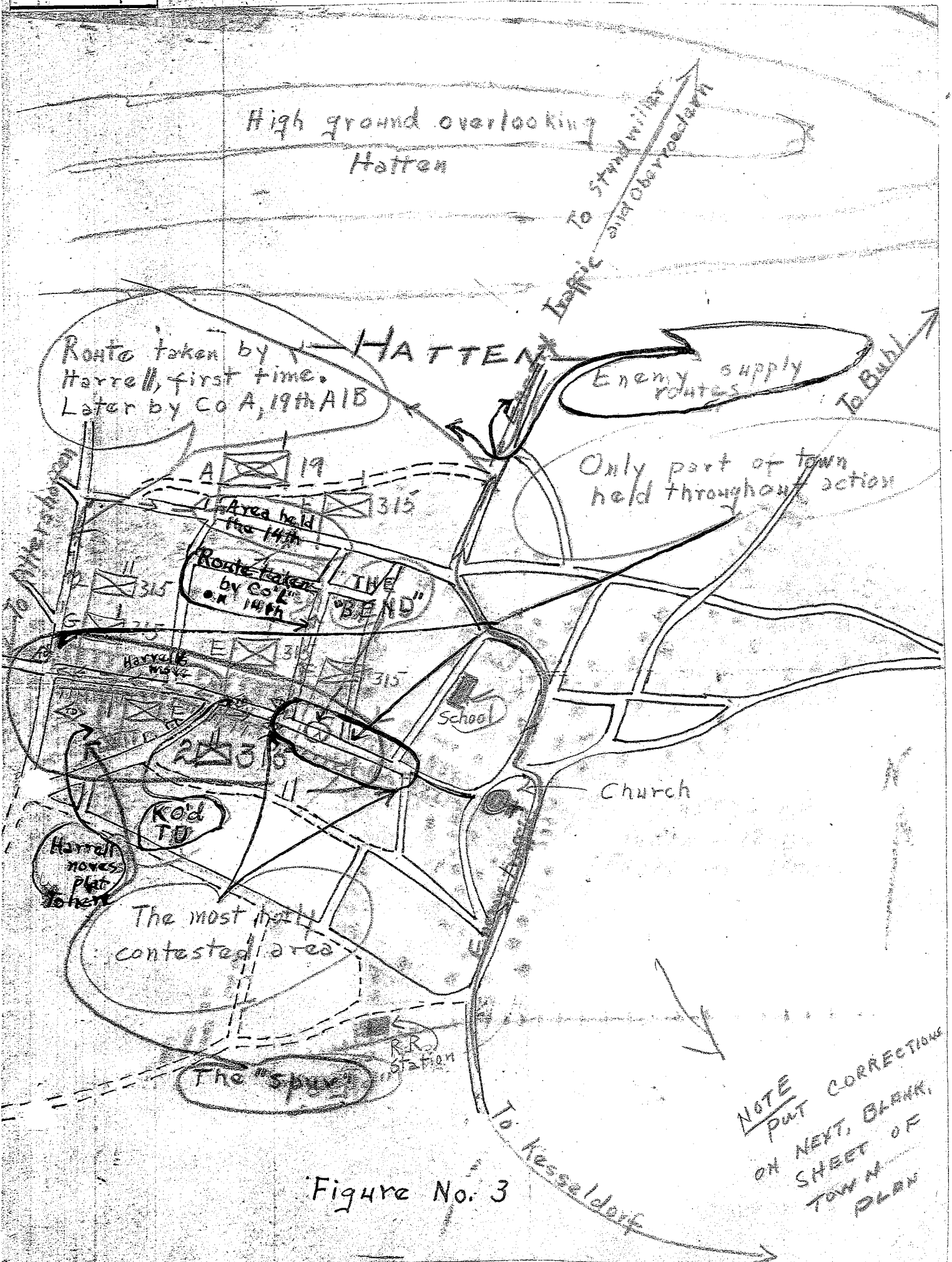


Figure No. 3

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BY: LS NARA DATE: 11/8

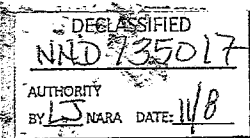
a machine gun mowing down several members of the party. T/Sgt Paul W. Duncan, leading the patrol, was ~~killed~~ ^{wounded seriously} by a blast from an M-VI tank as he and other members of the patrol were trying to make it back onto the main street. The more fortunate ones gained the buildings and worked back to the Company CP. There ¹⁸ were only eight of them. Corrected per Ind 26 June 1945

Notifying Battalion Headquarters of what had happened Captain Shrewsbury was instructed to send out another patrol with the same mission and with the added responsibility of trying to recover the wounded from the first patrol. The second patrol, not successful in working its way out of town, retired with the company to the extreme southwest end of town where, after posting local security details, the remainder of the company took ¹⁹ billets for the night.

Company F, likewise sent out patrols to find the tanks after ²⁰ contacting the Battalion CP of the 242nd Infantry. The F Company patrols went out north of town looking for tank tracks in the snow. They found none. The patrol turned east with the ²¹ same result.

¹⁸ Captain Ralph D. Shrewsbury, CO, Co G, interviewed at Co CP at Kaltenhaus, France, 2000, 29 January 1945. ¹⁹ *Capt. Shrewsbury originally stated that Duncan had been killed, but on June 1st report was received that he had been captured.*
²⁰ Shrewsbury, supra.
²¹ 1st Lt Morris W. Goodwin, Exec Off, Co F, interviewed at Bn CP at Marienthal, France, 1400, 28 January 1945.

²¹ The tanks must have been northwest of town on Hill 172.2 which is closer to Rittershoffen than Hatten. The tank destroyers which were to relieve the tanks during the night were found so situated the next morning. A message entered in the



consequently the company did not take up the position directed. However, because there was an enemy machine gun in the vicinity of the railroad station on the southern edge of town and because three enemy Tiger tanks were known to be lurking in the east end of town,²² Captain Nordstrom, commanding Company F directed a road block be established on the main street and local security details posted. Those of the company not otherwise on duty took up billets on the south side of the mainstreet in the west end of town next to the houses occupied by Company G.

In addition to the trouble that Company G ran into at the railroad station, both companies were continually harassed by all types of fire during that first night in Hatten. Friend could easily get mingled with foe. The area around the school house in the east central post of town where the 242nd Infantry had two Battalion CP's was a particularly uncomfortable spot, because "Jerries" were infiltrating all around.²³ One "Jerry Sad Sack" carrying five pails of hot soup, came stumbling

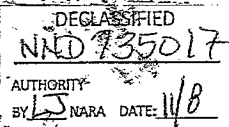
Bn Journal states that the friendly tanks could be seen, but that the Co dug in for the night without contacting them. Goodwin maintained that this was not so. At 0235 the Regt Journal reports that the "TDs have replaced the tanks in position east and south of Hatten". The entry in the Regt Journal, 100620, seems to be grossly in error.

22

Bn Journal; corroborated by Captain John P. O'Reilly, CO, Co H. Interviewed at Battalion CP at Marienthal, France, 1600 28 January 1945. O'Reilly stated that it was thought that an F Co man crippled one of the tanks with a bazooka causing the other to go into hiding for the night.

23

Goodwin, supra.



into one of the houses temporarily occupied by Company F men. After much blinking at the occupants of the house, the "jerry", realizing that he had come to the wrong address, nonchalantly turned on his heel to leave. Finally grasping the situation, one or two of the more alert boys tried to stop him. Very indignantly he insisted on being permitted to continue on his mission. It took some "strong arming" to dissuade him.²⁴

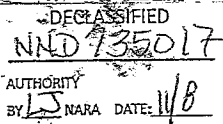
Shortly after daylight Company F started east down the main street in the southern part of town searching out the houses for enemy troops - one platoon working one side of the street and a second, the other. All the while small arms and direct tank fire was being received from the northeast portion of the town. 1st Lt. Morris W. Goodwin, leading the group, requested artillery fire about 0800 to quiet the enemy activity.²⁵ It did get results and may have forestalled an immediate enemy attack. Shortly afternoon platoons had taken all houses on the street to a junction with the Stundwiller Road, about two blocks west of the church. (See figure 3). Here because of increasing enemy opposition the company set up another road block and occupied the houses.²⁶

At 0815 the next morning, 10 January, the 2nd Battalion, assisted by tanks from the 14th Armored Division was supposed

²⁴ Goodwin, supra.

²⁵ Goodwin, supra, and Bn Journal, op. cit.

²⁶ Goodwin, supra.



27

to have launched an attack. Company G was to have taken the southeast part of the town proceeding to the original MLR positions while Company F, assisted by E Company, was cleaning out the northern and eastern portions of town and restoring the MLR northeast of Hatten. At 0725 four tank destroyers from the 827th TD Battalion were in position to the north of Hatten with infantry troops dug in around them. Prior to 0800 they reported that they were receiving heavy small arms fire. It developed that the enemy was preparing to launch an attack. When the impending attack came, an estimated force of two companies of infantry and five tanks struck the northern part of Hatten. Two of the TDs were knocked out and the remainder of this force was compelled to retire to Rittershoffen. The attack ordered for 0815 never really got under way although F Company did make one attempt

27

Company E and Company H (less 1 platoon) were still in reserve back in Rittershoffen where the Battalion CP was set up. Late in the night, company details which had been guarding the tanks were relieved because the tanks pulled out as previously arranged. About two hours later the 827 TD Battalion came in and took up positions east of Rittershoffen previously occupied by the tanks.

28

Sessions, supra.

29

There is some question as to what infantry troops these might have been. Lt Goodwin ventured the guess that they were from the 14th Armored Division. Though no effort was made to clear up the point, the writer believes that they may have been G Company men.

30

Sessions and Goodwin, supra.

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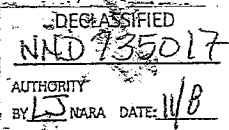
to push to the north and G accompanied by a few tanks tried to take the railroad station to the south. Superior enemy fire power forced both companies back to their original positions. In spite of the fact that the enemy was maintaining aggressive offensive action, higher headquarters was insistent that the battalion continue with its mission of cleaning out Hatten.³¹

In the meantime, 1st Lt. David R. Harding, CO Company E had completed preparations for the entry of his company into Hatten. Apprehensive, but knowing no better way to get into town, he "barreled" his company right down along the edge of the Rittershoffen-Hatten road arriving in town about 1100. Strangely enough the company received no shelling along the way. By going to F and G CPs, Lt. Harding got an idea of the amount and type of opposition that might be expected in an assault on the main north street.³²

After being briefed as to the situation, Lt. Harding made a personal reconnaissance in an attempt to discover the best avenue of approach to the main street running through the northern part of town. His inspection disclosed that there were several square blocks of sparse orchard cover in this area and only a few houses, all of which were on the third cross street from

³¹ Sessions, supra.

³² 1st Lt. David R. Harding, CO, Co E. Interviewed at Co CP at Marienthal, 1300, 3 February 1945.



the west end of the town. Harding, in spite of its lack of adequate cover, decided to send his assaulting force up the cross street on the far west end of town.³³

For the mission Lt. Harding selected what he considered to be his best rifle platoon, led by 1st Lt. Luther J. Harrell (then possessor of the Silver Star with an Oak Leaf Cluster) to spearhead the attack. Harding figured that Harrell could take the north street, if anyone could.³⁴

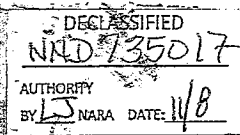
Accordingly, Lt. Harrell led out with his platoon about 1530. Another platoon followed behind to act as a covering force. Lt Harding took up a position between the two. On reaching a small bridge about 50 yards from the north intersection, Harrell could see the first house on the north street about 150 yards away. Unquestionably the open space between was well covered by enemy fire. Under light, small arms fire from the orchard, Harrell and his platoon made a dash for it, one squad actually gaining the first two houses. Before the others could come up, however, an enemy tank which had been lurking back of the houses came into the open and started shooting into the houses with HE shells. As the men started to scatter they were machine gunned by the tank. Pvt. Homer Hawkins and one or two others were killed. The remainder of the platoon flattened under the withering fire which by this time had been appreciably augmented by small arms and automatic

33

Ibid.

34

Ibid.



fire from the woods and heavy friendly tank fire from the
³⁵
 direction of Rittershoffen.

Harding shouted an order for Harrell to withdraw his platoon if he could. After vainly putting up grenade and flare signals which should have been understood by the tanks, Harding jumped in his jeep and headed in the direction of Rittershoffen to see if he could stop the friendly tank fire from that direction. Because of lack of satisfactory coordination, which was quite typical of the battles for Hatten and Rittershoffen, the friendly tanks, unaware that American troops were trying to take the north street, took the figures seen in the northwest corner of the town to be German soldiers.³⁶ While on this mission Harding reported to the Battalion CP in Rittershoffen that his company was in a tough spot.³⁷ On returning to the scene of the action, Harding found that seven more of the platoon had become casualties. In the withdrawal it had been impossible to recover any of them. Two at least,³⁸ were believed to have been killed.

Finally reassembling his whole company on the south street, Harding decided it was too late to try again. Finding unoccupied houses between G and F Companies' positions, he directed three of his platoons (including weapons) to occupy several houses

³⁵

Ibid.

³⁶

Ibid.

³⁷

Bn Journal, op. cit.

³⁸

Harding, supra.

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on the south side of the street. Harrell took his platoon
39
directly across the street.

The situation for Company F holding positions in the southern part of Hatten had become extremely critical while Company E was trying to clean out the north side of town. By 2 o'clock things were so bad that Captain Nordstrom, CO, Co F, reported that he could not continue to hold his position. Enemy tanks seemed to be everywhere. During the afternoon he was successful in borrowing a bazooka from Company G, but he felt that he needed tanks and TDs and called for them. Around 1800 he reported that there were 12 enemy tanks opposing him.
40

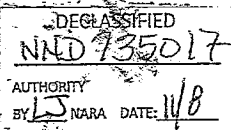
It is hard to explain how Company F retained its position that afternoon against the continued threat of such imposing odds. One morale booster for the company and a thorn in the side of the enemy was a beat up, immobilized M-10 destroyer abandoned by the destroyer unit previously in the town, supporting the 242nd. Some say that it was this TD alone that made it possible for any American troops to stay in Hatten during those first few days.
41

pfc - -Marsker, Company H machine gunner, formerly a TD

39
Ibid. Later on the 13th when the 242nd Infantry formally withdrew Harrell's platoon moved down onto the spur off the south street where Co G, 242nd Infantry, had been and where the 94th Reconnaissance Squadron, 14th Armored Division, later also set up a CP.

40
Bn Journal, op. cit.

41
Goodwin, supra.



man, snoopd around the destroyer while he was working his way down the south street with his section accompanying Company F. He found that, though the tank would not go, the three inch naval gun it carried was still in workable condition. The TD was situated about half way between the west end of town and the church. (see figure 3) Because of the bend in the south main street, enemy tanks coming from the direction of the church were not able to see it until rounding the bend. ^(See fig. c.) Just the sight of the destroyer with a crew manning it was enough to scare the tanks back. Although there was ammunition for the destroyer, the impromptu crew never fired its 76.2 mm gun during the day and a half it was manned. Someone continually manned the machine gun, however, much to the discomfort of the enemy trying to come beyond the bend.

42

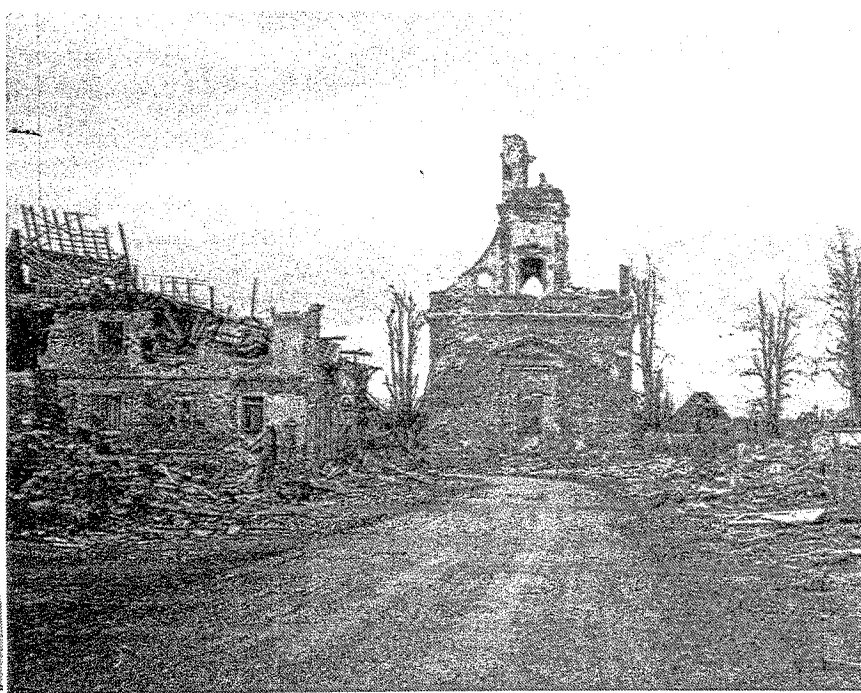
The trouble that the 2nd Battalion had had during the afternoon was the result of a coordinated enemy attack by an estimated battalion of infantry and six tanks. Friendly armor had not yet reached our troops. After driving Company E from the north street, however, the enemy seemed to be satisfied, temporarily at least, and the situation became static

42

Capt John P. O'Reilly, CO, CO H. Interviewed at Bn CP at Marienthal, France, 1400, 29 Jan 1945. There were differences of opinion on this point - some saying that the 3 inch gun was fired. Members of the 827th TD Bn were reported as later taking this gun over. 2nd Lt. Robert F. Jones, commanding the platoon of TD's in the town, and Sgt. Harry Johnson, one of his men, played some part in this action.

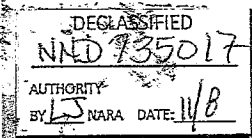
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THE CHURCH AT HATTEN



This is the way the area around the church looked some days after the battle. This is part of the hotly contested area beyond the bend.

Fig. o.



43

for the night. The rest of Company H moved into town and rendered fire support to the rifle companies throughout the "battle of Hatten".

only once after this did American troops succeed in again holding, and then only tentatively, any portion of north or east Hatten. (See fig. c.) It was apparent that the reason the enemy was so anxious to hold those parts of the town was the fact that much more was at stake than merely occupying the town. Supplies and men coming from the direction of Buhl and Seltz could follow a defiladed route north of Hatten and between Hatten and Rittershoffen without being under observation from our troops north and south of Rittershoffen and above all from our artillery. (see figure 4) This was an all out attempt to stage a major breakthrough and though, while not lightly regarded by the enemy, the presence of a few troops in Hatten was not a critical threat as long as they could be restrained from interfering with scheduled attacks against points farther west.

44

During the night of January 10-11, orders were received for the 2nd Battalion with the assistance of the elements of 242nd Infantry still in Hatten to continue the attack to clean out the rest of Hatten. Throughout the long hours of darkness the enemy kept up a terrific artillery barrage on

43

Sessions, supra.

44

Col Maurice K. Kurtz, DAO, 79th Infantry Division. Interviewed at Schwindratzheim, 1600, 5 February 1945.

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the town. Added to this an exceedingly large column of American artillery led men of the 79th Infantry Division who had "sweat it out" at both places to state that this was worse than Emberrinil.⁴⁵

The 2nd Battalion CP at Rittershoffen was hit early that night, breaking all telephonic lines of communication. For the remainder of the action, disrupted communications was to become the order of the day. Shelling and heavy vehicles continually tore up the lines. Radios ~~could not be depended~~ ^{were not completely} ~~satisfactory~~ ^{because of the continual interference from tank radios,} the secret nature of most messages, and the inability to supply parts or replacements for damaged or destroyed sets. Later the higher echelons of command could not understand why communications with the besieged defenders could not be maintained.⁴⁶

Corrected
per Ind
26 June 45
JF

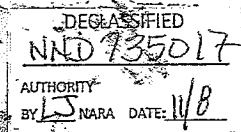
At 0530 (the 11th) a heavy enemy mortar and artillery barrage was directed into Rittershoffen. During the night the 3rd Battalion 315th Infantry, had come up and had established dug in positions in a huge semi-circle extending from the northeast to the southeast edges of the town. After continuing for about an hour, the barrage suddenly lifted. Immediately enemy infantry and tanks started streaming by north of Hatten, and into Rittershoffen along the route they had so desperately tried to keep open. The 3rd Battalion's

45

Sessions, supra.

46

Bn Journal, op. cit., and Sessions.



defensive positions in Rittershoffen were completely over-
⁴⁷
 run and the troops routed.

The 2nd Battalion CP in Rittershoffen was taken completely by surprise. The battalion's three anti-tank guns in position and their prime-movers were "steam-rollered" by the assault, but the crews had enough presence of mind to render the
⁴⁸
 pieces useless before abandoning them.

In the haze of the early morning hours, the enemy dressed in all white uniforms were difficult to discern against the heavy cover of snow. Some of the enemy troops, who succeeded in infiltrating to the barns across from the Battalion CP, tried to dislodge the CP group from the houses it held. Later in the morning when the attack abated, the Battalion Headquarters Company was hastily organized in a defensive position to hold the southwestern edge of town and the CP group re-
~~retired~~ ^{Correction: In Ind 26 June '45 is in error}
 tired to the town of Neiderbetschdorf where (except for a very small advance CP group which went into Hatten on the 13th)
⁴⁹
 it remained for the next nine days.

After the rearward displacement of the 2nd Battalion CP, ^{and the Mine Platoon of the Antitank Company,} all available cooks and motor pool personnel, under the direction of the Regimental I and R platoon, were formed into a defensive line extending from eastern edge of ^{Hatten} ~~Neiderbetschdorf~~ to the railroad to the south. The Battalion Headquarters

47

See Rittershoffen Story which follows.

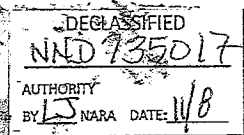
48

Sessions, supra.

49

Ibid.

Corrected per
 Ind 26 June '45
 JB



Company, which still held a defensive position on the southwestern edge of Rittershoffen, aided in the defense of this area and, with these combined efforts, it was possible to keep the Niederbetschdorf-Rittershoffen supply road open. This route was kept open during the entire Rittershoffen-Hatten action. The railroad station south of Rittershoffen, which became a critical point because of its use as a relay station and a collecting and supply point, was never allowed to fall into enemy hands.

50

The situation was considerably relieved in both Rittershoffen and Neiderbetschdorf when elements of the 68th Armored Infantry Battalion, Combat Command A, 14th Armored Division succeeded in getting into Rittershoffen sometime after 1600. Some of these troops took up defensive positions with the Battalion Headquarters Company troops defending south Rittershoffen.

51

At one point during the 11th January attack by the enemy on Rittershoffen, a small group of enemy tanks detached itself from the main body going to Rittershoffen and swung in towards Hatten. Three of the four tanks with the force swung in close around the west end of the south main street where G Company was. This was a fatal mistake.

52

During the previous night (10-11) a platoon of four TDS

50

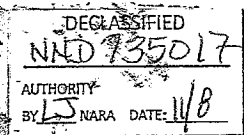
Ibid.

51

Ibid.

52

Shrewsbury and Goodwin, supra.



had reported into the town of Hatten as answer to Captain
⁵³
 Nordstrom's earlier frantic request for armor. This destroy-
 er group was commanded by 2nd Lt. Robert F. Jones, who has
 since won high praise for his gallant efforts in breaking
 up the enemy attacks on Hatten that day.

Jones had set his destroyers (M-18s) in position - two
 at the west end of the south main street and two holding about
 50 yards west of the "bend" Still further back around the
 "bend" also the old M-10 destroyer continued to be a threat.
 During this attack, which was coordinated with attacks on all
 parts of the town except the south, Lt. Jones is reported to
 have made his way, unconcerned for his own safety, back and
 forth among the five destroyers giving the crews instructions
 and shouting encouragement. His action is credited with giving
 his colored boys the inspiration to perform in a brilliant
⁵⁴
 manner.

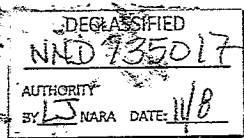
Outstanding was the cool courage of Sgt. Spencer Irving,
 commander of one of the destroyers at the west end of the
 street. Irving hidden by the houses of the street triangula-
 tion (the "spur", see figure 3) bounding the southwest corner
 of the town, saw the enemy tanks coming before they saw him.

53

This was reported as being the same TD platoon that had
 been forced back to Rittershoffen the day before suffering
 the loss of two vehicles which were replaced for this mission.

54

Shrewsbury, supra.

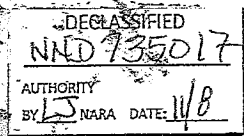


PART OF THE ENEMY HELD NORTHEAST PORTION
OF HATTEN



The continuation of this street leads to the right and down past the church from the North. Probably more American artillery fell in this area than anywhere else in either Hatten or Rittershoffen.

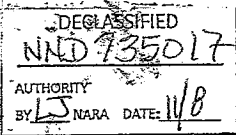
Fig. d.



After they had crossed the Rittershoffen-Hatten road it was too late. Trying to swing their tanks into firing position off the southwest corner of the town they came around with Irving, who came out of hiding, literally looking down their throats. At this juncture Irving, standing up in the turret of his vehicle, is alledged to have turned to Company G troops dug in around him and with utmost solemnity asked, "Jackson, how does you want them? One, two, three or three, two, one? 'Ah'll thinks Ah'll take them one, two, three". Making good his statement he then proceeded to pick them off in that order. As the enemy crews jumped out of their disabled vehicles, the TD machine gunners and others sprayed them with ⁵⁵ lead. All of them were killed.

The street fighting continued after dark and, in addition to the three tanks Irving accounted for, the other TDs also knocked out a half track and a command car. Those blocking the street up from the church dispelled any ideas the enemy may have had about bringing armor up that end of the street. At one juncture an ambulance half-track nosed around the bend. Thinking at first that perhaps it was loaded with some "Jerries" who wanted either medical aid or to surrender, fire was withheld. Then it was noted that the Germans had their helmets on and carried arms. The "pay-off" came when a Jerry tank came nosing in behind the half track. It was then that the TD boys let them have it. If the Jerries in the half-track needed medical

⁵⁵ Goodwin, supra.



it wasn't for their legs. As they scattered in all directions, machine gunners and riflemen stopped them in the early stages of their flight.⁵⁶

In the course of the day's action Companies E and F and G all engaged the enemy - sometimes at close quarters. From very early in the morning Company F in the southeastern part of Hattēn had repulsed enemy armor and infantry attacks from the direction of the church. Daisy chains (mines) were being used to help stop the tank thrusts. At 0340 the Company reported to the Battalion CP that a tank came down the street far enough to shoot into some of the houses the company was occupying. Between 0630 and 0730 Company F made requests⁵⁷ for tanks and artillery.

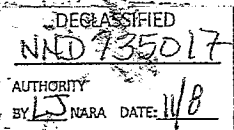
Company E in the southwestern portion of town had been made aware of the attack just about daylight when Lt. Harding received a report from his outpost that a platoon of enemy tanks and infantrymen were circling around from the north to the western side of Hatten. After making a report to headquarters, Harding organized his company to meet the attack. All that day counterattacks were met and repulsed. During one period in the day's activities, Harding's mortar section of about 10 men, acting as riflemen, helped Company G stave off an infantry

56

As a matter of fact the medical half-track and the vehicle listed in the report merely as a half-track are probably one and the same vehicle.

57

Bn Journal, op. cit.



and tank attack from the northwest. The net result of the day's activities as far as the 2nd Battalion was concerned was that now the Battalion was completely cut off from the rest of the world. The enemy had severed the Hatten Rittershoffen road.
58

During the night of the 11-12th the enemy made two attempts with infantry supported by tank fire to penetrate 2nd Battalion positions. Artillery and small arms fire succeeded in repelling these attacks. At daylight, the enemy made one attempt which resulted in the TDS "chalking up" two more vehicles - an M-IV tank and a scout car. The enemy made no real concerted attacks during the day.
59

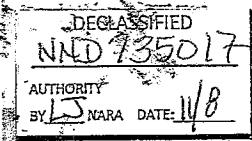
In the early morning hours of the 12th, plans were getting under way for the relief of troops of the 315th Infantry Regiment in both Hatten and Rittershoffen. The main body of CCA of the 14th Armored Division was to come into Rittershoffen from the southwest with the mission of cleaning out the northwest and southeast portions of the town. CCB of the Armored Division was to push into Hatten to relieve the 2nd Battalion of the 315th Infantry and elements of the 242nd Infantry there. The attack was to be made over the ground between the Rittershoffen-Hatten road and the small creek that runs between the

58

Harding, supra.

59

315th Infantry Regiment, S-2 Report.



60

two towns to the north.

At 0830 the attack of CCA was reported as being in progress.⁶¹ The entry of CCA into Rittershoffen from the southwest was not made without enemy resistance. Moreover, instead of pushing on out of the town toward the east and the enemy with it, CCA became boxed up in a small area in Rittershoffen where it remained with the 3rd Battalion, 315th Infantry Regiment⁶² until the end of the engagement.

CCB, on the other hand, was not successful in accomplishing even its original mission. Jumping off late, at 1130, and attempting to bypass Rittershoffen on the north to swing down onto the proposed route, CCB met such strong enemy resistance that it was pushed back suffering several casualties. CCB took up defensive positions back of Hill 178¹ where although, orders were issued to continue the attack, it remained until the general withdrawal seven days later. In effect a secondary defense line was set up with CCB defending north of Rittershoffen and with CCA in Rittershoffen, and to the south. The 94th Cavalry Recon Squadron for the time was helping hold the right flank between Rittershoffen and the Forêt D'Ashbruck⁶³ to the south.

With many wounded men in Hatten requiring blood plasma and

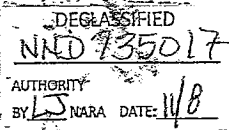
60

1st Lt. Edgar B. Mooney, Jr., Historical Section 7th Army. Mooney covered the 14th Armored Division on the Hatten-Rittershoffen action.

⁶¹Regtl Journal, op. cit.

⁶²Mooney, supra.

⁶³Ibid.



with stocks of certain types of ammunition running low, those in the rear concerned for the welfare of the 2nd Battalion, 315th Infantry and elements of the 242nd Infantry isolated in Hatten spent a considerable part of the day of the 12th trying to get critically needed supplies into Hatten. Sometime during the late afternoon the 312th FA tried placing shells filled with medical supplies in the town. This device did not prove satisfactory. The supplies in the one or two shells that were recovered were so badly damaged that they could not be used.

While attempts to shoot supplies into Hatten were in progress, 1st Lt. Herschel Q. Holly, commanding the A & P platoon of the 2nd Battalion, who was with the CP group back at Niederbetschdorf, was also given the mission of trying to hand-carry some of the most critical items. Starting from Niederbetschdorf at about 2100 with an eight man carrying party, Holly struck off toward the railroad tracks hoping that he might follow the tracks into Hatten.

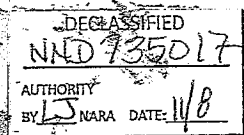
Near the Rittershoffen railroad station the party ran into an enemy outpost. Lt. Holly was slightly wounded before he gave up the idea of trying to push through. As his men started retracing their steps a German self-propelled 88 shot into the group from the high ground northeast of

64

Shrewsbury, supra.

65

1st Lt. Herschel Q. Holly, 2nd Battalion A & P platoon, 315th Infantry Regiment. Interviewed at Bn CP at Marienthal, France, 1400, 30 January 1945.



Rittershoffen killing Cpl Arthur Bustemente. No further attempt was made to get supplies through to Hatten that night.⁶⁶

In the meantime plans were on foot for air-dropping supplies into the town. The planes asked that the drop area be marked and further wanted to know what marking device would be used. E Company discovered three red bed sheets which were thought to be suitable for the purpose. After daylight the morning of the 13th the planes took off on this mission of mercy. Because of the unfavorable meteorological conditions, however, the panels could not be located by the planes. Some other means of identification was requested. Company G put up yellow smoke the employment of which was little more successful than that of the sheets had been. Only two of the bundles were recovered - and both of them damaged beyond use.⁶⁷

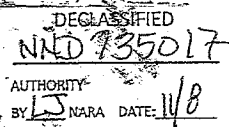
Unsuccessful though the attempts to shoot and drop supplies into Hatten may have been, the recovery of the two damaged bundles may have made it possible for the establishment of more orthodox means of supply. One bundle was seen to drop just a short distance out of Hatten to the west. Pfc Lars T.O. Ohlsson, with considerable personal risk, went out and got this bundle. However, the condition of the supplies did not warrant the danger incurred. Recovering the other bundle

66

Ibid.

67

Ibid.



which almost dropped in Rittershoffen rather than Hatten called for even more courage. It was seen to fall near the railroad station on the southern edge of town. S/Sgt Elmer Matthew, Company G, volunteered to go get that one. With considerable reluctance, Captain Shrewsbury gave his permission. Much to everyone's surprise, Matthew made the round trip without incident and in so doing revealed something quite gratifying. The route he took must have been screened, over the entire distance, from enemy artillery as well as small arms. On the night of the 13th and thereafter, Matthew's path (see figure 4, "supply trail") was used daily for sending up supplies and reinforcements.⁶⁸

During the night of 12-13 the Company F experienced an attack by flame throwing tanks which were to continue to terrify, kill, and maim the troops for the remainder of their trying stay in Hatten. In addition to the flame throwers, of course, tanks and infantrymen also participated in the attack. Although a combination of artillery, mortar, and small arms fire is credited for breaking up the attack, only in the hearts of those men up front will sufficient thanks ever be rendered for the part that American artillery played in repeatedly denying the enemy access to the south street.⁶⁹

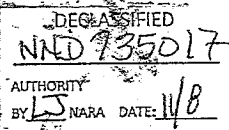
Artillery, Army, Corps, and organic, any battery which could possibly place its deft fingers of death on the town -

68

Shrewsbury, Goodwin, and Holly, supra.

69

Goodwin, supra, and En Journal, op. cit.



had been alerted to fire into and around the town on call. Artillery observation points were located at every suitable place and where an officer or noncom was available to call for fire. Any company or platoon CP or any outpost could indicate the target and the type and quantity of fire and obtain immediate response.⁷⁰

Organic mortars and the pieces of the Regimental Cannon Company, because of their innate ability to provide close supporting cover, turned the tide of much of the "in-fighting" at the "bend". This was especially true in the early days of the seige when the houses on the "bend" were still reasonably intact and, as a consequence, exercised a confining effect on the action. During the night and on into the morning the cannon company unerringly placed shells on select targets - many times between 50 and 100 yards out front of the F Company troops. As dramatic and inspiring as the effect may have been to the troops down front, little more than a general statement can be placed on paper. "Cannon company has fired 100 rounds on tanks and infantry 300 yards west of the main road junction at the east end of Hatten".⁷¹

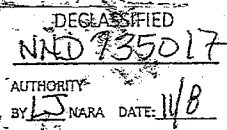
Counterattacks continued into the daylight hours of the 13th and during the morning the enemy made a desperate attempt to encircle and entirely cut off the troops in Hatten. Amidst

70

Goodwin and Kurtz, supra.

71

Goodwin supra, and Regimental Journal, op. cit.



heavy shelling from the northeast and with tank duels going on both north and south of town, a strong enemy force tried to get by the "bend" on the south main street. At the same time another enemy group of about company strength, starting out from the Hatten railroad station in the southern outskirts of the town, attempted to skirt the town on the south to catch Company G unaware from the west.⁷²

Unfortunately for the "Jerry", however Lt. Harrell, Company E, the afternoon before, had requested and obtained permission from Lt. Harding, his CO, to move his platoon down onto the "spur" street in the southwest part of Hatten. This street extends in a southwesterly direction from about the middle of the south main street.⁷³ He had explained that he could set up his platoon in the upper stories of the building in this area in such a way as to hold off a whole regiment if necessary. He could keep the Hatten railroad station under observation and place it under his fields of fire. Sporadic enemy fire from the vicinity of the railroad station had been a continual source of annoyance. The possibility of the enemy launching an assault against this area was a positive threat.⁷⁴

As the company of "Jerries" slowly bellied their way through the plowed fields and sparse orchard growth, Harrell and his men waited for them in the upstairs windows. Every

72

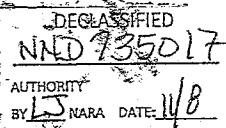
Harding, supra.

73

Ibid.

74

Ibid.

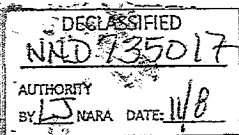


position harbored some sort of automatic weapon - Tommy guns, BAR's and light machine guns. Harrell was a rabid proponent of the automatic fire school and, somehow or other, had managed to equip nearly every man in his platoon with an automatic weapon of some description. The platoon held its fire until the "Jerry" troops had worked up to within about 100 yards of the houses. Then, on signal, it loosed a virtual wall of lead and in one fell swoop practically wiped out the whole company. Those enemy few who were able, dashed for the protection of the nearby houses - probably only to be captured. This disaster took all the force out of the enemy blow. Very shortly the force attacking from the east also withdrew. ⁷⁵

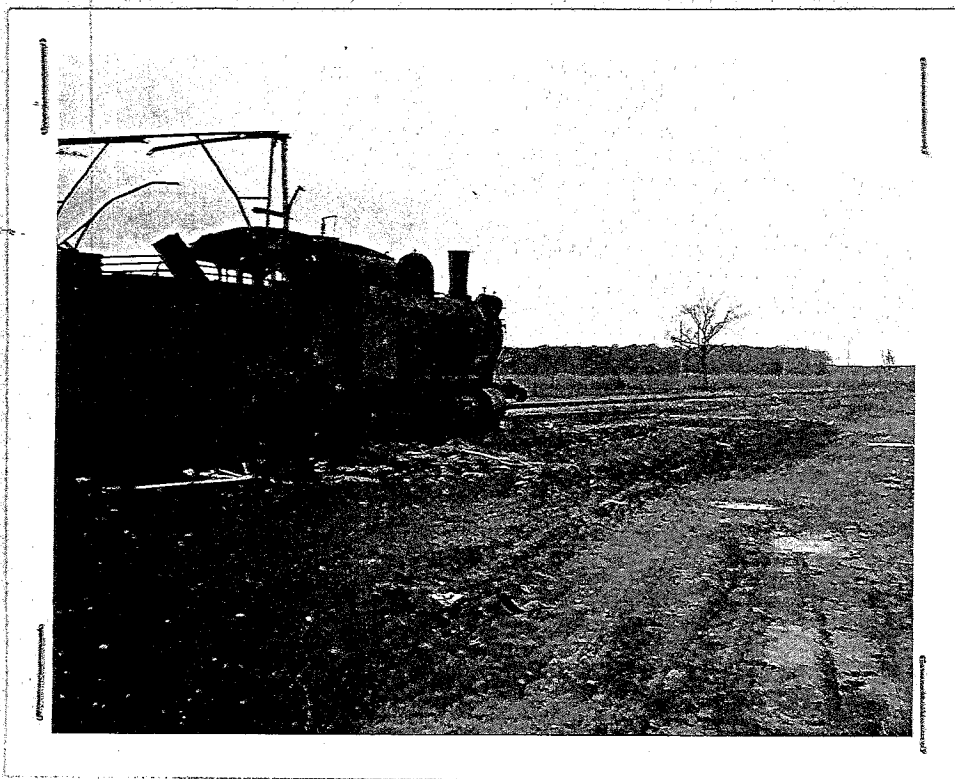
To assist CCA and CCB in restoring the MLR as part of the 14th Armored Division effort, on the morning of the 13th the 19th AIB supported by the 47th Tank Battalion (CCR) was brought into position to drive into Hatten between the Rittershoffen-Hatten road and the railroad tracks to the south. ^(See fig. e.) An early assault around 0900 failed disastrously. Losing a large quantity of equipment and great number of men, the assault turned into a route. Some of the disorganized troops fled into the woods to the south. Back south of Rittershoffen CCR reorganized to renew the assault. Quantities of new supplies and equipment had to be brought up to replace, to a certain extent, those which were lost in the first attempt. About

75

Ibid.

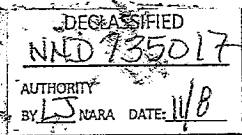


THE RAILROAD TRACKS BETWEEN HATTEN AND RITTERSHOFFEN



Looking back to the Southwest from the Hatten railroad station. It was over this open terrain to the North of the tracks that CCR staged its attack. The woods to the South between Hatten and Rittershoffen can be seen in the distance.

Fig. e.



the time CCR was in position to launch its second attack of⁷⁶
 the day, remnants of the 242nd Infantry Regiment which had
 been in Hatten came out of the town.

In the meantime a contingent of tanks from the 48th Tank
 Battalion was sent into Hatten to meet the continued insistent
 demands from that quarter for more armor. This group got under
 way probably about two hours before the main body finally suc-
 ceeded in jumping off about 1600. Three tanks entered Hatten
 and as they wheeled up from the southwest behind the buildings
 occupied by Company F, the lieutenant commanding, threw open
 the hatch of the lead tank and gesticulating wildly screamed,
 "You're saved. We've come to liberate you. General Smith⁷⁷
 has ordered us to get you out."

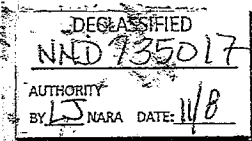
Most of the 3rd platoon of Company F, the heavy machine
 gun section, and some others who could not help but hear and
 see the frantic officer, took him at his word and began heading⁷⁸
 for the woods south of town.

A short time later Colonel Holton, 2nd Battalion Commander,
 received a message asking why his men were leaving Hatten.
 The Colonel answered back that, if any men were leaving Hatten,
 they were not members of his battalion. A short time later
 when he learned the truth about the situation, he was forced
 to retract his statement. Word was gotten to the tank commander

⁷⁶ The 242nd Infantry was later also used to maintain the
 secondary defense line between Rittershoffen and the forest
 and on into the woods.

⁷⁷ Goodwin, supra.

⁷⁸ Ibid.



ordering him to stay in the town. Out of difference to the tank officer it must be pointed out that a loosely worded order, capable of dual interpretation, may have been responsible for his bringing erroneous instructions. The message read that the tanks were to go into Hatten "and help our troops out".⁷⁹

By 1630 in the afternoon about 60 men including a group from Company C, 242nd Infantry had made their way back to the Battalion CP at Neiderbetschdorf.⁸⁰ It was reported that many other men were hiding out in the woods or still straggling back. Steps were initiated to round them up. Many more than this initial number were picked up during the next two days.

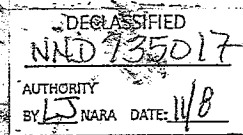
As a result of the accidental discovery that there might be a safe supply route into Hatten, Lt. Holly of the A & P platoon was once more given the mission of organizing a carrying party to take supplies into Hatten - especially morphine, bandages, and blood plasma. Sgt -- Hill, a medic, was with the supply party. Since there was no one in Hatten proficient at administering plasma, his services would be badly needed there. Holly arrived at the Rittershoffen railroad station with his patrol while CCR was still trying to get organized for its second attempt to break through to Hatten. Deciding

79

Regt Journal, op. cit.

80

Goodwin, supra.



it unwise to try to precede the attack, Holly waited to follow⁸¹ in on its heels.

While there Holly discovered that the armored force was taking an artillery trailer loaded with supplies in with it. Nevertheless Holly decided to go in with his carrying party also. It is fortunate that he did because as a result of⁸² general confusion the trailer was lost.

Holly got into Hatten safely and, in less than an hour after the troops in the town were aware that friendly troops were coming in, he reported to Captain Shrewsbury of Company G, to find out what disposition to make of the supplies. Because of its favorable location - the point in town most remote from the center of activity, the G Company CP and nearby houses were being used among other things, as aid stations and storage dumps. Leaving Sgt Hill and the supplies at G Company, Holly picked up 15 walking wounded and three prisoners and took them back to the Rittershoffen railroad station. On the way⁸³ he recovered a wounded soldier from the 19th AIB. At 1815 the patrol was reported as having successfully accomplished its mission. These were the first supplies received by the troops⁸⁴ in Hatten since their arrival.

From the 13th on supplies went into Hatten regularly every night over this same route. The officer or noncom in

⁸¹

Holly, supra

⁸²

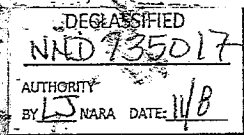
Ibid.

⁸³

Holly, supra

⁸⁴

Bn Journal, op. cit.



charge of the detail, by guiding on an old PW cage sitting back up on Hill 162.5, was able to keep himself oriented and follow Holly's original trail. ^(See fig. f.) Generally half tracks were used for hauling the supplies because of the cross country run and the deep snow.
85

To avoid Jerry traps the time was varied each night. The enemy knew that the route was being used, but could do little about it because at no point along its length did it seem to be under enemy observation. However, on the 16th about 2100, about the time the enemy thought the train should be on the trail, a 60 round barrage of artillery and mortar fire was laid along the route. The supply train waited until midnight before shoving off. On the way back the Jerries ambushed the three half tracks knocking one of them out with a bazooka and killing three men including at least one of the wounded that were being evacuated.
86

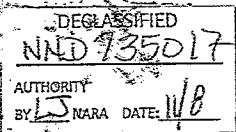
The next night a friendly barrage was placed in the southeast corner of Rittershoffen and the woods southeast of the town. The purpose of the barrage was to drown the noise of the half tracks as well as forestall any enemy designs on the train. It got through without incident.
87

To return to the action in the town, however, during the night of 13-14 the 2nd Battalion was successful in continuing to hold what little it had in the town against constant enemy

85 Holly, supra.

86 Ibid.

87 Ibid.

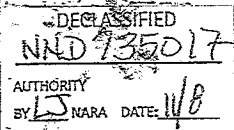


THE PRISONERS OF WAR CAGE MARKING THE SUPPLY TRAIL



It was by guiding on the old prisoner of war cage sitting back up on the side of Hill 162.5 that the supply details ran provisions into Hatten each night.

Fig. f.



pressure. The troops of the 2nd Battalion, though pleased to have the 19th AIB (of CCR) in town with them, could not understand why the tanks were withdrawn after dark. In the company F sector enemy tanks and troops were still trying to come up the street from the church. Throughout the night and the next day small arms, machine gun, mortar, and artillery fire, harassed the American troops continuously. A number of enemy jabs were thought to be broken up by our artillery. During the night, also, Colonel Holton and Captain -- Potter, the latter the 2nd Battalion, S-3, established an advance CP in Hatten, moving in with Company G. The Headquarters Company which had been defending south of Rittershoffen was relieved and withdrew back to Weiderbetschdorf to the rear Battalion CP. Colonel Holton took many men who had withdrawn from Hatten earlier in the day back to Hatten with him.

It had been difficult to find a place for all of the troops in Hatten that night. Part of Company A of the 19th AIB, moved in with and along side of Company F; Company B of the AIB, occupied houses down on the south spur street with Lt. Harrell's E Company platoon; and part of Company A took up Harrell's old position across the south street from the Company E CP, some of the men also moving in between Companies E and

88

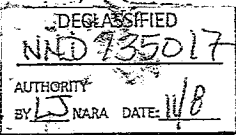
Certain documents, especially the Regimental S-2 Report, states that flame throwers were used in Hatten this night. No oral statements confirm this statement.

89

Report, op. cit.

90

Sessions, supra.



91

G on the south side of the street.

The next morning (the 14th) Colonel D. H. Hudelson, commanding CCF, took steps to clean out the town. In short the plan was to push north and east from the small area held by American troops. It was a very elaborate plan but it was destined to fail.

92

The Hudelson attack got under way about 1100. Company F spearheading an assault down the south main street towards the church was successful in regaining ground up to its farthest point of advance.

In working up to the north street, Company A of the AIB, accompanied by two Sherman tanks, went up the same cross street (the first from the west) formerly used by Company E in the previous attempt to gain the north side of town. Company A met considerable resistance and one of the tanks was knocked out but the company succeeded in reaching its objective. As soon as Lt. Harding, CO Company E, had been notified of Company A's success in occupying a couple of houses, he moved his company out taking the slightly defiladed second cross street.

93

The 2nd platoon, led by T/Sgt Vincent F. Doyle, succeeded

91

Harding, supra.

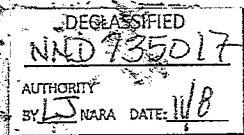
92

Goodwin, supra.

93

While in Hatten, Doyle was notified that he was being awarded a battlefield commission and that he should report to Regimental Headquarters to be sworn in. Unfortunately Sgt Doyle was killed in Hatten before it became possible for him to report.

Corrected per
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in getting only short distance up the cross street before it ran into heavy machine gun fire. Doyle led his platoon out of the line of fire, west down a small trail that runs parallel to the main streets. Here the platoon became pinned down. Doyle called back to Lt. Harding who was still back on the main street with the next platoon. He wanted to know what to do. Harding yelled for him to try to get a detail around to the left (west) in an attempt to silence the gun positions causing the trouble.⁹⁴

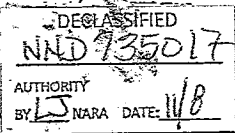
S/Sgt Thomas E. Lane, 2nd squad leader, signaled to his squad and together they got up and bolted in a wide arc through about 150 yards of open field and out of the line of fire. Pfc Moy King Ming, who joined the Army to fight Japs, but who on a number of occasions had stated that he liked killing "Jerries" just as well, dashed out several yards ahead of the squad. Rushing the positions, which consisted of two improvised pillboxes joined by a trench which led onto the north main street, Ming thrust his rifle barrel through the aperture of the first pillbox and fired a couple of shots and then for good measure tossed in a couple of hand grenades. Jumping down into the trench, and killing 2 or 3 Germans as he went, he headed for the second pillbox, but its defenders had lost nerve. They, five of them, came out with their hands up.⁹⁵

94

Harding, supra.

95

Ibid.



Ming's gallant action made it possible for Harding's men to continue its attack. Gaining a couple of houses on the north street the two platoons started to work east down the street - Doyle on the left and 2nd Lt. Robert R. Shirley, the other platoon leader, on the right.⁹⁶ An enemy tank was spotted and its location was relayed back to Company A from which the remaining Sherman was dispatched. The sight of the Sherman and the "bazooka" teams caused the enemy tank to withdraw. Working down to within about 100 yards of the first road junction, the force found itself again opposed by an enemy tank and a number of enemy "bazooka" teams who were setting fire to the houses by shooting into them. Instructions came through to hold up the attack. Lt. Harding withdrew the 2nd platoon back around the 3rd cross street and set up defenses and occupied houses in that vicinity. When he took up these positions, Harding was convinced in his own mind that they were untenable because of the enemy still holding the high ground 200 yards to the north. However, at about 1730 it was reported to Colonel Hudelson that the troops in Hatten were holding both north and south main streets.⁹⁷

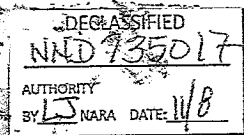
The enemy attack which drove the American troops from the north street began about 2100. Sgt. Doyle of Company E heard

96

Ibid.

97

Harding, supra.



the disturbance and upon investigating, saw five enemy tanks proceeding west toward Rittershoffen along the high ground to the north. Three others loaded with infantry were bearing down on the west end of the street where Company A of the AIF occupied houses. Another, also accompanied by infantry, was coming down the street from the east. As the tanks opened up with their "big guns" and automatic fire E Company platoons were caught in a withering cross fire. In the vicinity of Company A, houses were being set fire by incendiary bullets and flame throwers.⁹⁸ Some of them were already on fire.

Seeing that resistance was futile, Lt. Harding ordered his men to withdraw. By using the cover of the houses across the street to the best advantage, the men were able to work down onto the cross streets and make their getaway to the south street where the platoons reassembled. Company E was missing only one man and he came back an hour or so later after being captured twice. He guessed he must have slept through most of the battle. The attack ceased as soon as all American troops were cleaned from the north street.⁹⁹

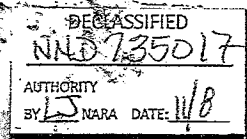
At 0500 (the 15th) however, the enemy again assumed the offensive. For those who were there, the 15th will long be remembered as a very rough day. Although flame throwing tanks had appeared earlier, this day the enemy seemed bent upon burning

98

Ibid.

99

S-2 Report, op. cit.



up the town completely. By 0525 F Company had surrendered two or three houses taken with so much difficulty two days before. Between 0500 and 0745 Company F suffered five separate assaults. The men abandoned some more houses. Tanks and TDS were still in position back around the bend in the street much to the distress of "jerry" tankers who would now and then poke the snouts of their "iron chargers" around the bend only to receive a direct blast from a 76.2. One frustrated enemy tank commander pulled a new one out of the all too well known German bag of tricks. Not being able to get far enough around the bend to get a direct shot at a particularly bothersome American tank, he let one go that ricocheted off the side of a building¹⁰⁰ and into the American tank knocking it out.

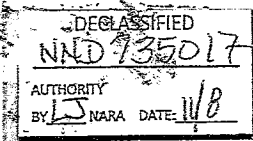
The last assault of the morning consisted of five tanks which seemed particularly determined to break the American strangle hold on the street. The tanks were methodically destroying all of the remaining houses one by one this trip. They would sit back and, with machine guns and 88s going full blast, hammer holes through what walls were still standing. Then the flame throwers would follow in for the kill pouring Satan's brimstone through the apertures. Or they would follow HE shells by tracers setting fire to the hay in the numerous barns.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰

Goodwin, in the face of some kidding, maintained he saw this happen. It is not known what type of shell may have been used.

¹⁰¹

Wolf, supra.



All during these flame throwing attacks and for the remainder of the "seige of Hatten" civilians complicated matters seriously. Men, women, and children were being burned or shelled to death along with the American soldiers, but where the latter - being soldiers - could restrain themselves, the civilians were thrown into panic. To say the least the American forces were hampered because in any piece of planning, the welfare of the civilians had to be considered.¹⁰²

It was during one of these assaults, on F Company that Pfc. Pete S. Salzar, heavy machine gunner from Company H, had his gun set up in a barn about a block back from the church. The barn was set afire. Directing the rest of the crew to leave the burning building, Salzar stayed with his gun and holding his fire until the jerries were within 50 yards of his position, he completely wiped out the foot-troops accompanying the tank spearheading the assault. In trying to make his getaway he collapsed from the loss of blood. His squad sergeant, Sgt. Rakusin rescued him.¹⁰³ On another occasion a day or so later, Rakusin turned in a performance similar to Salzar's while working with Company G.¹⁰⁴

During one of the attacks of F Company also, Sgt Vincent Muraski, a heavy machine gun squad leader stayed with his gun until the building had burned nearly to the ground around him. His gallantry enabled many an F Company man to escape from the

102

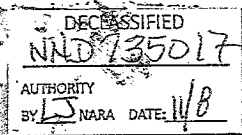
Ibid.

103

O'Reilly, supra.

104

Ibid.



burning houses - eight of which were on fire at one time -
¹⁰⁵
 without getting shot.

It was around noon when the 2nd platoon of TDS were placed in support of the 315th in Hatten. These from the 813rd TD Battalion replaced those from the 827th which had turned in such a remarkable performance a few days before. The 827th TDS were still in the vicinity, but were being employed in the
¹⁰⁶
 woods to the south.

In spite of the fact that the enemy's hammering offensive was keeping the 315th men back on their heels once more orders were issued by higher headquarters for the 2nd Battalion to attack - this time to be at 1500 and againⁱⁿ the direction of the church. Things were getting to the point where trying to go beyond the bend on the south street was sheer suicide. Most of the buildings for well over a block, had been levelled practically to
¹⁰⁷
 the ground. There was no place to take any cover.

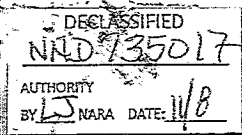
Although weak thrusts had come from that direction before during the day, it was not until the later afternoon of the 15th that the enemy staged a concerted drive through the orchard between the north and south streets. Since he had suffered attacks from all directions, Captain Harding, Commanding E Company had a hunch that the next one might come from the north.

Apparently the "Jerries" were not particularly anxious to come in from that direction. It had many disadvantages. The

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Bn Journal, op. cit.

¹⁰⁷ Goodwin, supra.



forest cover, while not heavy enough to provide good cover for foot troops, was sufficient to discourage tanks from trying to come through. The conformity of the terrain was such that the ground sloped away from the south street ending in a definite gully while north of the north street there was an abrupt rise. As Captain Shrewsbury, commanding G Company, stated, "Jerry sure must have felt frustrated to have tried to make it that way."

At any rate, try it he did and by 1500 hours Companies E and G were trying to repulse the sixth counterattack coming up from the draw that afternoon - and just when, according to orders, they should have been attacking rather than defending. This attack, like the others, was staved off and enemy dead ¹⁰⁸ was piling up in the orchard.

By 1600 the situation had become so desperate that Colonel Holton, during a brief period of radio contact, pleaded that he must have more help if to continue to hold the town. Reports were coming in that gave evidence that another strong enemy ¹⁰⁹ attack was in the offing.

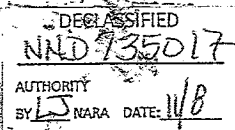
The full force of the expected attack came from the east about 1700. As the result of Colonel Holton's desperate call for help, arrangements had been made whereby GCR would commit its reserve of tanks and in conjunction with the 19th AIB would

108

Shrewsbury, supra.

109

Bn Journal, op. cit.



attempt to recover the ground lost earlier in the day by the Company F - i.e. back to the junction of the Hatten-Ritters-hoffen road with the main north road leading in from the direction of Standwiller. After an all night battle during which CCR regained and lost the hotly contested pile of rubble beyond the "bend" the situation became somewhat more stabilized. Dawn the next morning (16th) found Company C of the 19th AIB reinforced by elements of the 95th Cavalry Recon Squadron holding in about the same positions as those taken over from Company F the night before. The net result was more houses burned and a larger pile of rubble - and more casualties.
110

To combat this fire menace, Colonel Holton issued a request during the night for pole charges and flame throwers so that his men might be in a position to reciprocate in kind. So much time was required for locating the requested items, that after they were brought in, a day later, they were never used.
111

About 2200 the men of Companies E and G were alerted at their posts by shouts and war cries out of the orchard. Houses were burning down on the east of the town where Company F and the 19th AIB were trying desperately not to be burned out of the town.
112

110

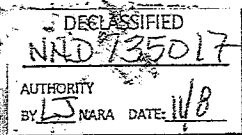
Mooney, supra.

111

Bn Journal, op. cit.

112

Shrewsbury, supra.



The "Jerries" coming up through the snow were hard to spot because of their white uniforms. American troops in and around the shadows of the houses, on the other hand, wearing OD were just about as hard to spot. To overcome this handicap "Jerry" again shot tracers into the haylofts to set fire the buildings and light up the area. Soon all of the defenders of the street were beautifully silhouetted against the burning buildings.¹¹³

This disadvantage had to be over come by stubborn resistance. E and G Company men stayed at their posts in spite of enemy infiltrating all around them. Pvt Jose B. Martinez, a rifleman, was one of the staunch defenders who steadfastly held his position killing German after German as they dashed madly up the slope toward him.¹¹⁴ One machine gunner from Company H had a "field day" playing "Shave and a Hair cut - Six Bits" on his machine gun not missing a beat as he squeezed off the right number of rounds for each bar.¹¹⁵

The last attack up through the orchard had been a bold one. In spite of the hail of lead with which they were met, the Jerries kept coming. A few got as far as the south street before being shot down, but not many. Some few others, questionably more fortunate, succeeded in infiltrating the defenses along the south street and getting down onto the spur where Lt.

113

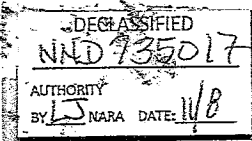
Ibid.

114

Harding, supra.

115

Ibid.

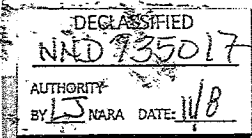


Harrell of E Company had his platoon. Harrell's men killed at least two and captured four or five more down there. When finally convinced that they could not come through the orchard either, there were not many of them left. At least 60 dead
116
germans were piled up on the slope.

On the morning of the 16th Lt. Harding, E Company CO, received instructions that his company was to make the next thrust east down the south street in an effort to gain the area around the church. He had been told that Company C of the AIB had regained the street down to within a block of the church, and that his company should pass through C and keep
117
going.

Lt. Harrell and Lt. Shirley and their platoons were selected to make the attack. The 3rd platoon, Harding held in reserve. About 0815 the two platoons, abreast, each in column, jumped off from the Company CP - Harrell on the right and Shirley on the left. Neither platoon was making any special effort to keep under cover for the men supposed that Company C of the AIB were holding the street as they had been told. About 50 yards beyond the bend in the street the two platoons were ✓ blasted into by fire of all descriptions including grenades and rockets. Too late it was discovered that they had walked into a trap; that Company C was not up that far. Apparently

116
Ibid.
117
Ibid.



118

the Company had withdrawn without reporting the fact.

In addition to intense fire frontally, the platoons were catching it on both flanks and from a point to the rear where about one squad of German infantry was holed up in a gutted barn. Both Shirley and ~~Doyle~~ ^{Harrell} were killed very shortly after the firing began. Most of the men sought refuge in the one last standing building in the block.

Corrected per Ind 26 June 45
HBO

119

By SCR 300 Harding obtained permission to withdraw, but how to provide his men with cover was another matter. It was then that he noticed a Sherman tank setting in front of his CP. Coming up he put the question to the tank commander. The latter cautiously moved a safe distance down the street and very obligingly fired a couple of volleys, but declared that he would not budge another inch until the Jerries had been cleaned out of the barn.

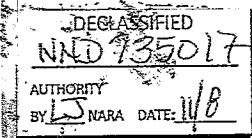
120

Harding was desperate because it would probably be only a matter of minutes before his trapped men would be shelled or burned out of the house. Contacting 2nd Lt. Lewis T. Putman, commanding the H Company, ^{a section leader,} ~~mortar platoon~~ Harding asked him if he could place some 81 mm mortar fire on the barn. Putman thought he could. The very first shell, white phosphorous, landed directly in the ruins, driving screaming "Jerries" in every direction.

Corrected per Ind 26 June 45
HBO

121

- 118
- Ibid.
- 119
- Ibid.
- 120
- Ibid.
- 121
- Ibid.



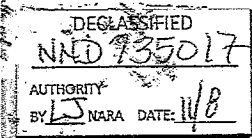
The Sherman then unlimbered itself and headed down the street blasting eight or ten rounds of heavy stuff into the rubble as it went. Out in the open, where nothing that even faintly resembled a house could be seen standing on either side of the street, the tank opened up with both machine guns. In working their way back to comparative safety only two men out of the two platoons were wounded. A later check, however, disclosed that there was a whole squad missing. Late that afternoon five bedraggled figures shambled into the Company CP. The rest of the squad never came back.

For the remainder of the day CCR took over and were successful in recovering the ground they had won and lost the night before. It was the same thing all over again. The American troops were forced to withdraw, - more houses burned, more rubble and all paid for with the lives of more men.

The explanation for this renewed enemy fury that marked the days of the 15th and 16th might be laid to the fact that another crack German Division had been thrown into the line with orders to make a break through - or else. Against the Hatten defenders there were opposed the 1st and 2nd Battalions of the 20th Paratroop Regiment of the 7th paratroop Division in addition to elements of the 21st Panzer and the 25th Panzer Grenadier Div-
122
isions. In sharp contrast to the white uniforms worn by members of the 21st and 25th Divisions, the new assailants were

122

S-2 Report; op. cit.



dressed in slick black and at night in the erie light of the burning buildings they appeared against the snow background as dancing shadows of Satan darting in and out of the black rubble. Their appearance had a demoralizing effect on the American troops, but in spite of the severe strain they had been under for many days, very few of them cracked.

During the day of the 17th the enemy launched another attack from the east with approximately two infantry companies and six tanks. This attack succeeded in gaining some ground up the south main street. CCR bore the brunt of this attack and by counterattacking from the south of town was able to break up the attack, costing the enemy two tanks. During the CCR counterattack, an enemy position south of the town was overrun and severe casualties inflicted. Following this the 19th AIB, CCR, pushed down the south main street and
123
retook the lost ground.

Late in the afternoon, a sortie of eight tanks and forty infantrymen came out of the woods southeast of Patten heading towards the town. Tank, tank destroyer, and artillery fire was brought to bear on this group and succeeded in knocking out two of the tanks. The attacking force withdrew before it hit the
124
town.

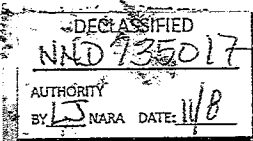
For the remainder of the day and night the enemy contented himself by maintaining moderate but constant mortar and artillery

123

315th Inf Regt After Action Report, January 1945

124

Ibid.



fire. Late the night of the 17th orders were issued by higher headquarters to hold present positions. It began to look as if a general withdrawal might be in the air. ¹²⁵

During the day of the 18th the enemy staged two attacks - one early in the morning and again rather late in the afternoon. The attacks were only of one and two company size and perhaps less determined than those during the early days. The force of both attacks was broken by artillery. The AIB was taking the more active part in the days action - sending out patrols into the rubble and containing the counterattacks from the east. Enemy artillery mortar, and direct fire was heavy during most of the day increasing to a decided crescendo prior to the afternoon attack. The pressure on the AIB troops holding the south street did not slacken during the night and at 2100 the AIB with the assistance of fine artillery support ¹²⁶ broke up another flame throwing attack.

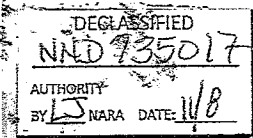
By and large, however, the enemy attacks were losing their punch. On the 16th it had been estimated that the enemy was containing the town with 1,000 infantry troops and eight or ten tanks. Enemy activity indicated that these troops were leaving Hatten in large numbers. It appeared as though the enemy, dissatisfied with his progress in this sector, might be massing strength to the east to be used in the Sessenheim sector. It was also believed that some of the artillery and

125

S-2 Report, op cit.

126

S-2 Report and After Action Report, op. cit.

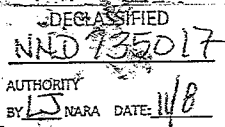


tank support had been shifted to that supposedly weaker spot. 127

In spite of these heartening signs, however, the events that transpired in Hatten the day of the 19th were in the nature of the enemy getting in a few healthy punches before pulling a "fade out". Around 0600 Capt Robert E. Potts, Battalion S-3, called on the 310th F.A. Bn for a heavy concentration of artillery fire in the draw separating the north from the south side of town and also on the enemy held portions of the east end. There were significant indications that a large, enemy, infantry force was massing for a general attack. With an OP close up to the enemy positions, S/Sgt John J. Stepeck, a Company G man, did a magnificent job of calling in the "mail" that is credited with breaking up the attack. With shells practically falling on top of his position, Stepeck on at least one occasion called back, "Bring the next one in 25 yards closer." American artillery continued to pound in on these enemy held areas sporadically throughout the day. Corrected per Ind 26 June 1945 JTB

Around 0730, however, the troops in Hatten received a terrific concentration of enemy tank fire from the high ground north of town. At 0745 all friendly artillery batteries able to fire in the sector were requested to bombard the areas north and southeast of Hatten and a short time later the 48th Tank Battalion was alerted to assist in containing the attack. Between 0800 and 0930 it was estimated that approximately

127
After Action Report, op. cit.
128
Shrewsbury, supra.



3,000 rounds of combined enemy mortar, artillery, and tank fire
129
were absorbed by the American held portions of the town.

Though repeated calls were made for tanks, the armor failed to arrive in Hatten soon enough to help quell the enemy demonstration. An infantry attack supported by one tank was broken up by the AIB down on the south street. The tanks sitting back all around the town, however, continued their fire until about noon. From thereafter until about 1900 there was a constant enemy bombardment of artillery and mortar shells on
130
the town.

Not only was the enemy shelling the town, but on the enemy held positions our artillery and mortar elements were doing just as thorough a job. Mortar crews, both light and heavy, deserve immeasurable credit for their splendid work during the whole "Seige of Hatten". Captain O'Reilly, CO Company F, had a difficult time keeping track of his mortars and drawing enough ammunition to keep them going. O'Reilly lost his second mortar early in the morning of "the day of the big barrage." The Company C CP had been hit several times before, but this shell was big and the shamble of a house nearly disintegrated when it came in. The house caught fire. Several men in and around the CP were killed by the explosion among them T/Sgt Delbert J. Marlton of whom Captain Shrewsbury, commanding Company G stated, "He was the best platoon sergeant I've ever

129

After Action Report and Regt S-2 Report and Journal op.cit.

130

S-2 Report, op. cit.

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had.* Also killed were 2nd Lt. John Starick and some mortar men from O'Reilly's company who were sleeping in the house. They had their mortars set up in the back yard. One of the pieces was lost in the rubble.¹³¹

During the enemy thrust to get by the AIB holding the south street Captain O'Reilly got a request for his mortars to place fire to help contain the attack. About the only place he could find for the one piece he had left was between the walls of two burned out buildings. Here a crew set up a gun and during the remainder of the day expended about 400 rounds of shells. At least 50 of them were placed on the inter-¹³² section a block up from the church.

The burning CP set the battalion ammunition dump out back on fire. It was burning and, in addition to the seriousness of wasting precious ammunition, it certainly constituted a serious menace to the safety of the troops in the area. Pfc's Lars T.O. Ohlson and William A. Shoup, and Pvt. Raymond J. Kuhl, with utter disregard for their own safety, worked frantically dragging the "ammo" from the pile and putting out the fire. They were recommended for citations.¹³³

The disastrous results of this one shell hitting Company C CP is only typical of hundreds of more such incidents that occurred during the battles of Hatten and Rittershoffen. It

131

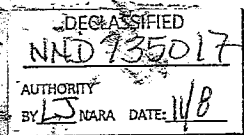
O'Reilly, supra.

132

O'Reilly, supra.

133

Shrewsbury, supra.



has been conservatively estimated that at least ten thousand rounds of artillery, mortar, and tank fire fell in Hatten alone¹³⁴ on the day of the 19th. Our own artillery was not as active as it had been on previous days because of the fear of running short on ammunition. More care was used in the selection of targets than before. In spite of this fact, the number of rounds falling on the town of Hatten alone was conservatively¹³⁵ estimated at well over 3,000 rounds.

Sgt. Hill, the medic who had been brought into Hatten because of his ability to administer plasma was also wounded by the shell that hit the CP. 1st. Lt. -- Heffner, the medical officer, and Sgt. Hill had several days before set up an aid station at the G Company CP. There were wounded men all over the place. After the house was demolished sick bays were set up around the area wherever even part of a roof might be¹³⁶ found overhead.

The day of the 20th was the last day of the 2nd Battalion's heroic stand in the "Battle for Hatten". On this day an order was handed down for the battalion to withdraw to a new defense line south of Haguenau. Prisoners stated that the 20th Regiment of the 7th Paratroop Division had been relieved during the previous night. Signs of enemy activity indicated this to

134

Ibid.

135

Captain Thomas R. Stepp, Ass't S-3 DAO, 79th Inf Div. Interviewed at Schwindvatzheim, 1600, 5 February 1945.

136

Shrewsbury, supra.

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be true. It was rumored that a new Panzer Division was taking over. Subsequent developments did not confirm this rumor,
137
however.

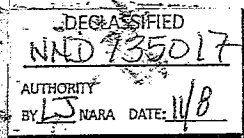
No enemy activity of consequence developed throughout the day and by 2215 that night it was reported that all troops were clear of the town of Hatten and were entrucking preparatory to moving out. Shortly after midnight the last of the 2nd Battalion troops departed from Hatten with few misgivings and
138
no fond recollections.

137

After Action Report, op. cit.

138

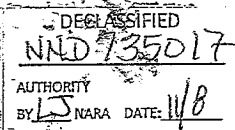
Regt'l Journal, op. cit.



Now back in Rittershoffen terrific fighting had been going on also. In a way the situation was very much the same as that prevailing in Hatten; so similar in fact that one might believe in the later telling that all of the men had become slightly confused by the ordeal they had been through - and that all of them actually had been in one and the same town. Quite often the French, German, and American versions of the same town name have been known to cause such mistakes. But Hatten and Rittershoffen. - No, it could hardly be possible.

But still there was the same bothersome church; there was the same school house; there was the same railroad station and tracks; and as in Hatten also, the American troops were boxed off in a small portion of the town along the main street with the Germans holding the major part - the north and east portions of town. The main difference seemed to be that we held the railroad station in Rittershoffen while the "Jerry" held the one in Hatten.

On the afternoon of the 9th of January the 3rd Battalion, 315th Infantry (less Company I) had moved into Hatten in Corps Reserve as part of the same maneuver that had brought the 2nd Battalion, 315th Infantry into Rittershoffen. The purpose was the same - to assist the 242nd Infantry Regiment should a major breakthrough develop. Company I assembled east of Leiterswaller



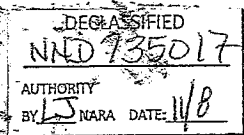
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as a "back-up" position for the 3rd Battalion, 313th Infantry which as will be remembered, had also sustained a strong enemy attack on the 8th. Movements to these points were made by motor and without serious incident.

Late in the day of the 10th, as we know, the entire 3rd Battalion moved into Rittershoffen accompanied by a platoon of tank destroyers and Col. Holton, the 2nd Battalion, announced to his troops in Hatten that the 3rd Battalion and Company E of the 2nd Battalion were being sent into the town to relieve them. Only Company E ever got to Hatten. From positions where it had planned to launch its attack on Hatten, the 3rd Battalion was overrun by a strong enemy attack on the morning of the 11th and forced back into Rittershoffen where it stayed for the duration of the "Battles of Hatten and Rittershoffen".

Company K under Capt. Orville E. Sutton had come down cross country from Kuhlendorf on the afternoon of the 10th. ~~(See fig 1)~~ During the march the men of Company K had the uncomfortable thrill of seeing German jet-propelled planes for the first time. The planes came in over head so silently that the soft "swoosh" which followed them was somewhat terrifying. The troops watched these planes pass on to throw a number of rockets and drop bombs into an armored column up ahead. As he drew nearer to Rittershoffen, Sutton made the subconscious mental observation that it was a very quaint and pretty town. Little did he know how

1 Lt. Col. Thomas K. Eason, Bn Comdr, 3rd Bn. Interviewed at Bn CP at Bischwiller, France, 1 and 2 Feb 45. Col Eason was promoted to rank of Lt. Col on the 12.



it would look eleven days later when he took his departure.¹

The 3rd Battalion had gotten into Rittershoffen too late to organize for an attack that day. Because of general unsettled conditions, it was decided that the Battalion should go into defensive positions in a rough semi-circle in the eastern outskirts of Rittershoffen.²

Company I, (less 1 platoon) commanded by Capt. George W. Goranson, moved out to the left flank or northeast of the town. One platoon was held in Rittershoffen in reserve. Here the company took up a position which included occupying a huge air-raid shelter, about 150 yards long. In addition to manning it as a defensive strong point, the Co CP was installed in the shelter. Company I (less 1 platoon) was placed on the line which extended roughly from the west slope of Hill 178.1 to a point about 100 yards west of the Kuhlendorf road. (See figs 4 and 5). It crossed the road, for which Company I was responsible, about the same distance from the town limits.³

After getting his instructions for the defense of the town, Capt. Sutton, commanding K Company ordered his company to dig into defensive positions from a point in the town limits just southeast of the church to the apex of the large "v" formed by the juncture of the Niederbetschdorf road with the street running out of the town to the south. (See fig 4) This position

1 Capt. Orville E. Sutton, CO Co K. Interviewed at CO CP at Bischwiller, France, 2000, 1 February 1945.

2 Eason, supra.

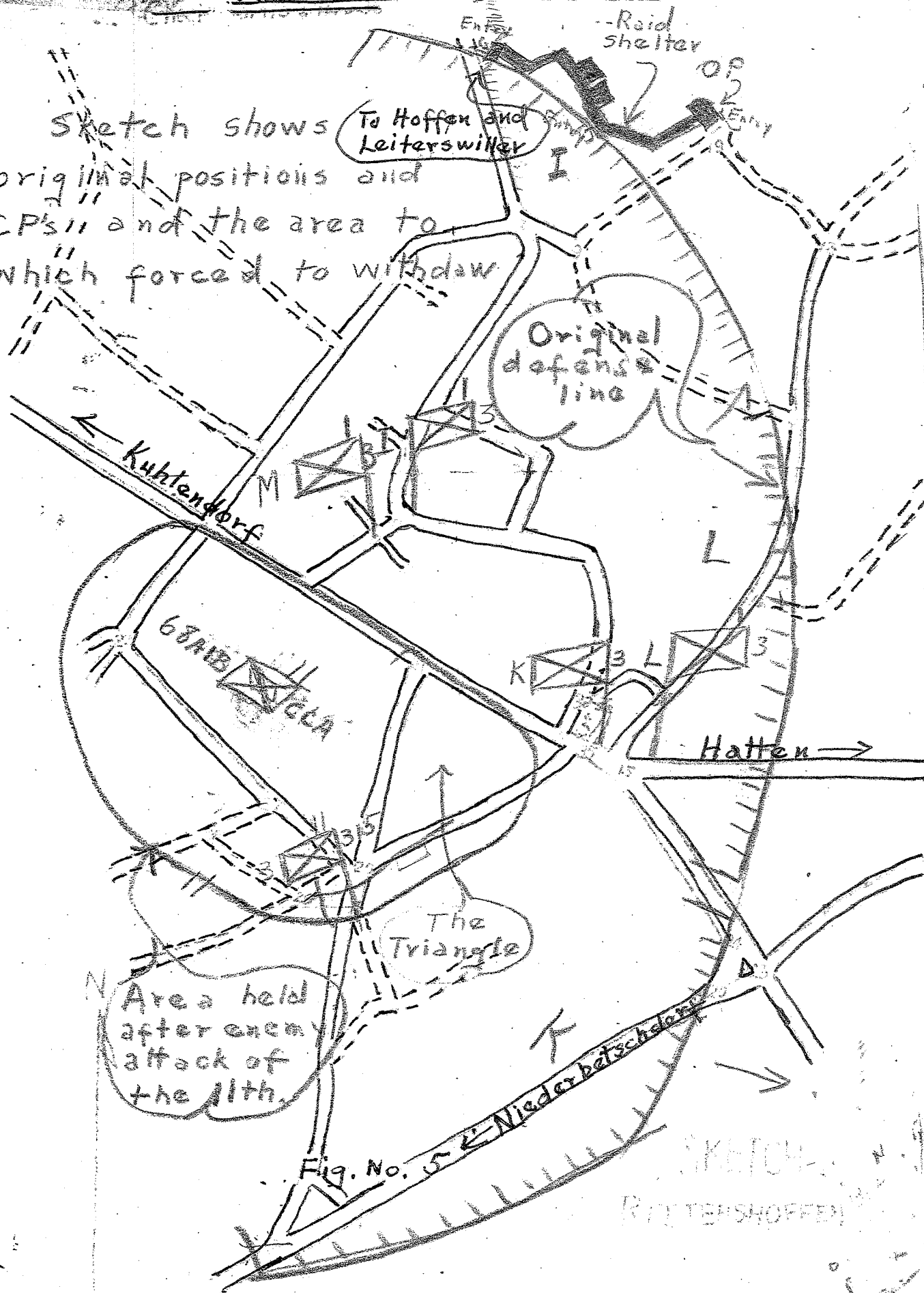
3 Capt. George W. Goranson, CO Co I, Interviewed at CO CP at Bischwiller, France, 2100, 1 February 1945.

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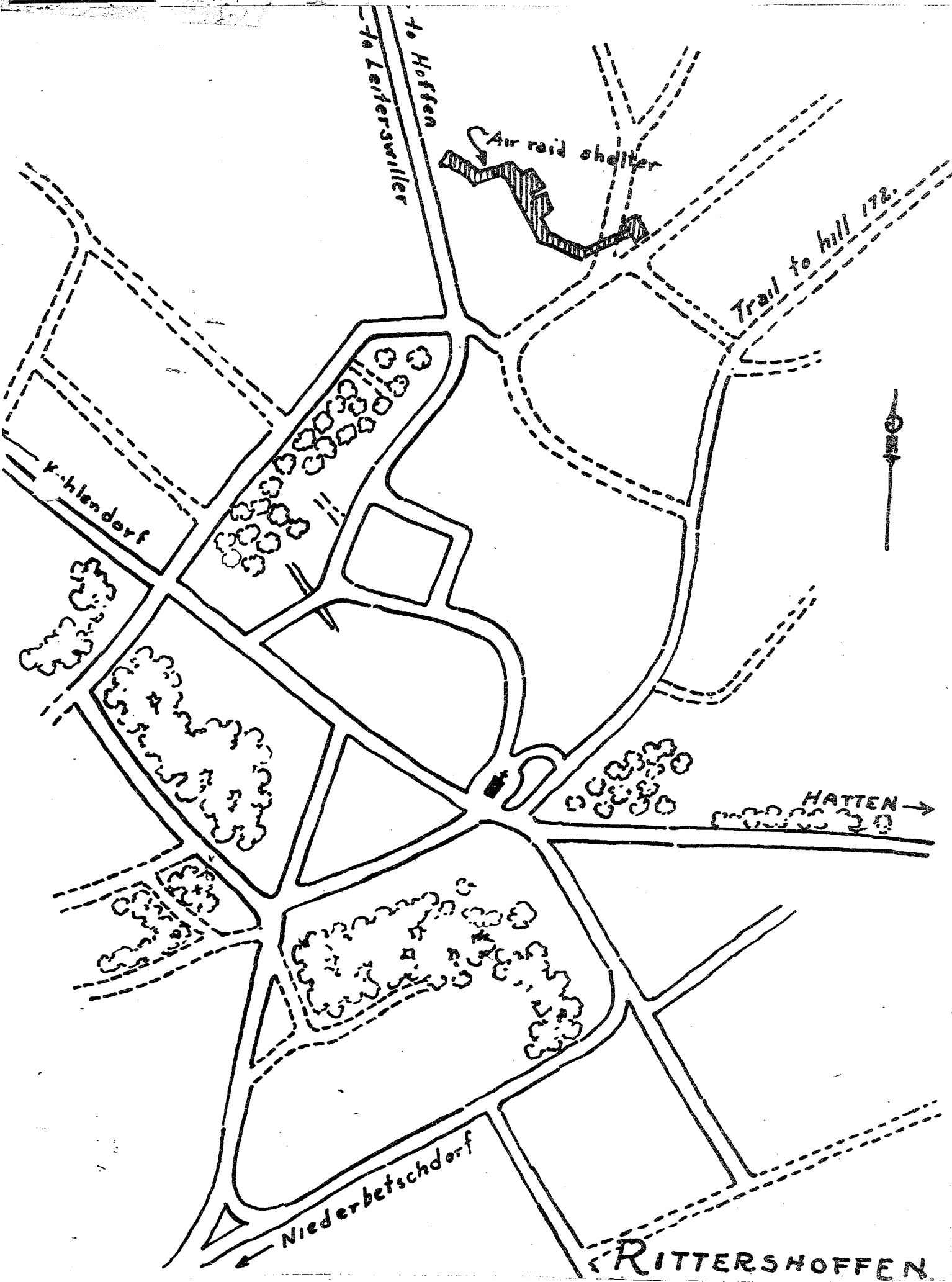
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RITTERSHOFFEN

Sketch shows original positions and CP's and the area to which forced to withdraw

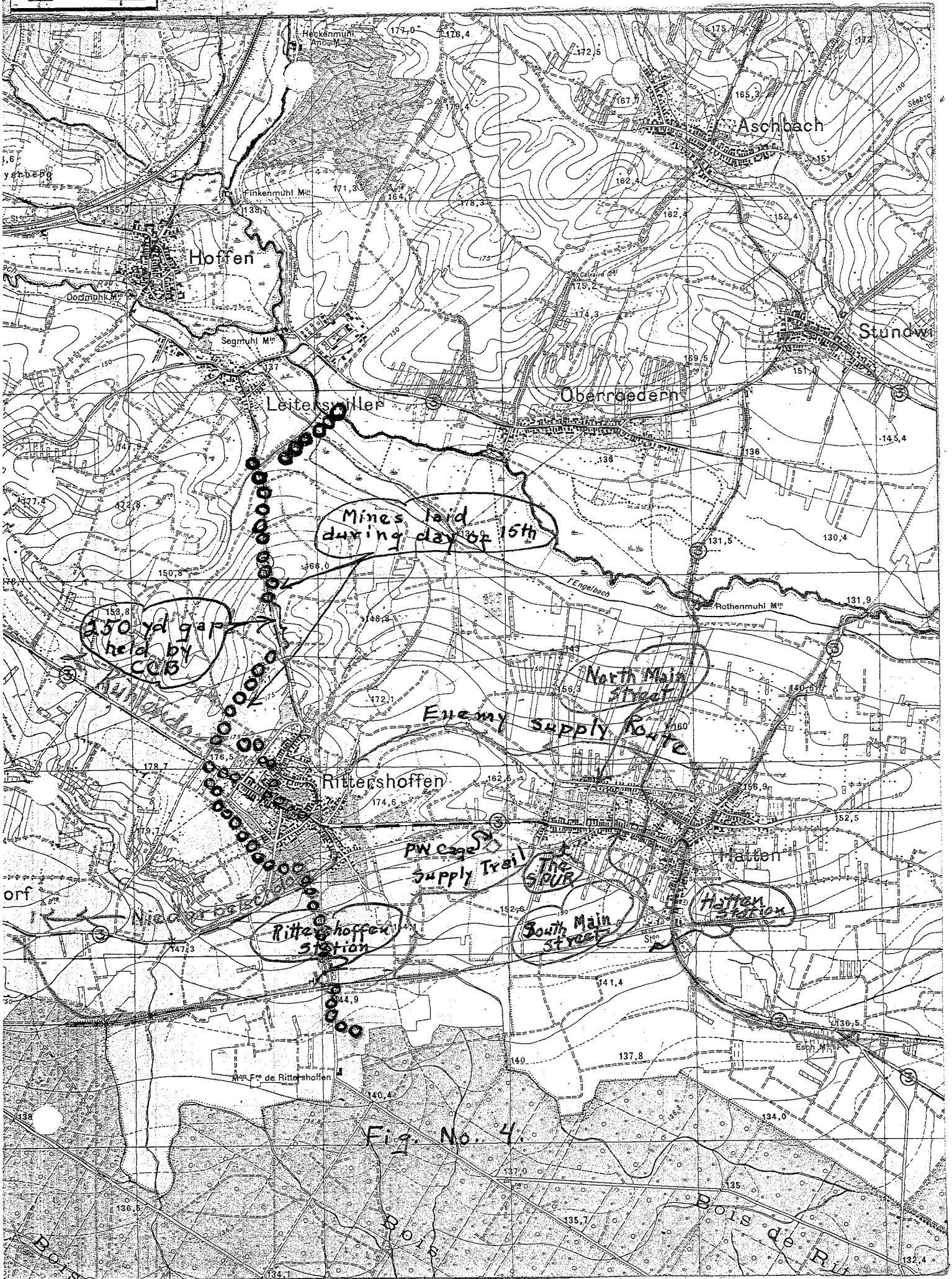


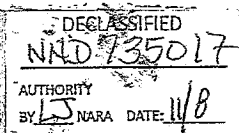
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came on the right flank of the Battalion line. On entry into the town Capt. Sutton established his company CP near the church.¹

Company L held the center of the line.² Along the length of the entire battalion line were interspersed machine gun sections from Company M, commanded by Capt. John R. Yeager. The mortar platoon was set up in the neighborhood of the CO M CP near the upper end of the short cross street which connects the Kuhlendorf road with that from Leiterswiller.³

Two TDs were in position on the line near the creek running between Rittershoffen and Hatten (The enemy supply route; see fig 4). Two more were farther north covering in a northeast direction and the few tanks that Company A of the 48th Tank Bn had left were covering the Rittershoffen-Hatten road. In addition to all this heavy armament twelve 57 mm AT guns (excluding the three protecting the 2nd Bn CP which was still in Rittershoffen) of the Regimental AT Company the Battalion platoon were scattered in and about the town covering all critical road junctions and entrances in the town.⁴

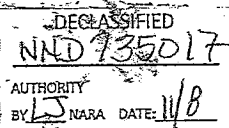
Most of that first night was spent digging into position. At 2300 Major Eason was notified that the ^{TD's} ~~tanks~~ were being ^{corrected per} ~~Ind. 26 June 45~~ withdrawn to Leiterswiller, about one mile north, where it was

1 Sutton, supra.

2 1st Lt. James L. Thome, Exec Off, CO L. Interviewed at CO CP at Bischwiller, France., 1500, 2 February 1945.

3 Capt. John R. Yeager, CO Co M. Interviewed at CO CP at Bischwiller, France, 1800, 1 February 1945.

4. Eason, supra.



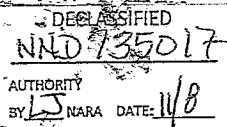
felt that they might be needed worse as direct support for the 3rd Battalion, 313th Infantry Regiment should a breakthrough occur in its sector. At the same time it was thought that the ~~tanks~~^{destroyers} would be in a position to support the 3rd Battalion, 315th Infantry Regiment, if necessary.¹

The morning of the 11th brought with it a nightmare that few, if any, of the men who participated in the action will ever care to remember. As a prelude to the impending disaster, at about 0530, the enemy laid down a heavy barrage of artillery and mortar fire but the troops in the foxholes failed to attach to it the proper significance.² In the dark, early haze of a cold January morning the attack came. The troops in the defensive position on the eastern outskirts of Rittershoffen were taken ~~completely~~^{somewhat} by surprise. The men, tired from previous engagements and forced marches, were either asleep or in that state of partial stupor associated with being too tired to stay awake and too cold to sleep. Noise and confusion had been the order of the night. What else could be expected, with troops moving into position and many stragglers drifting back from the direction of Hatten? Tank destroyer crews, gun crews and the men in the foxholes first thought that the advancing hord³ was just some more of our troops coming out of Hatten.

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The crest of the oncoming wave descended first with all its awful fury on the right flank of Company I. The line was broken and the force of the Wave swept on into Rittershoffen.

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- 1 Ibid.
 - 2 Thome, Supra.
 - 3 Eason, Supra.

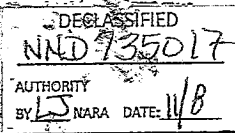


Some of the enemy tanks paused long enough, in their advance, however, to turn 88s and machine guns and to toss hand grenades on the American troops as, gripped by unreasoning fear, they desperately hugged the bottoms of their foxholes. Over here a trusting medic is rendering first aid to a wounded buddy. The two are in one foxhole together - the medic crouched over the wounded man. A German tank stops at the rim of the burrow - its machine guns chatter and, as the cold, hoary monster lumbers off, the lifeless form of the aid man slumps over his wounded comrade.

Some of the attacking forces swung south into Company L's positions which were, also, overrun. 1st Lt. James L. Tome, Executive Officers of the Company, back in the CP, got the news of the attack from the noise of the small arms fire. At first, he was inclined to pass it off as just another routine clash with an enemy patrol, but when an 88 shell set the CP on fire, he thought it time to take action. On looking out the CP window (see fig 5) he observed his reserve platoon to be pulling down the street and, then, 1st Lt. Earnest H. Shelton, platoon leader, dashed excitedly into the house to announce that German tanks had broken through the battalion line and were even now moving through the streets of town. On being informed of the state of affairs 1st Lt. Roger S. Ryan, CO, Co L, decided that the Company CP should be moved

1 In addition to wearing all white uniforms the enemy had all vehicles painted white.

2 Goranson, supra.



farther into the village immediately.¹

In leaving the old area in haste, the company CP group and the reserve platoon first tried to go in the direction of the church, but enemy infantry was blocking the street. Cut off that way, the men tried to escape through the orchard (see fig 6) to the southeast, but ran headlong into an enemy mortar barrage. Turning westward the group headed for the "triangle" where the Battalion was to be boxed-up during the ensuing days of the Rittershoffen action. The scattered remnants of the rest of the company succeeded in locating the Command group and reassembled.

Ryan and Thome reorganized the company on the street leading southwest from the church and then reformed a new line just northeast of the church (see fig 6). After checking in at the Company K CP which was right near the church, Ryan took his CP group down the street and occupied a house about a half a block from the church. Company I already had set up a new CP farther down the street.²

Company K was the last of the three rifle companies to feel the effects of the attack which hit the right battalion flank with a second assault wave. While Company L with its reformed line was trying to push its way out of town to the northeast to tie in on Company K's left flank, Company K was hit and forced back into the town also. The first tangible

1 Thome, supra.

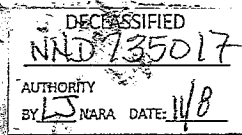
2 Thome, supra.

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RITTERSHOFFEN

(Approximate situation 13 Jan '45)



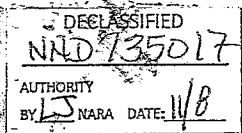


evidence Company K received of the enemy attack was when five white enemy tanks emerging from the snow and mist suddenly loomed up only a few yards away. Unfortunately, moreover, by the time the bulk of the company saw them, the tanks had already overrun the 3rd platoon and were setting between the company¹ and the town thus cutting off the most direct escape route.

Capt Sutton gave the order to withdraw and led his men south, to the woods from which they circled back into the town from the southwest. Establishing a CP on the "triangle" between Companies L and I, Sutton reorganized his company to help Company L drive the "jerries" out. By 1100 the two companies (Co K on the right-astraddle the Hatten-Rittershoffen road - and L on the left) succeeded in reoccupying parts of the town to the northeast. Company L regained the church which came to figure so conspicuously in the "Battle of Rittershoffen". This tenancy was short-lived. Very soon two enemy tanks came into the town along the Hatten-Rittershoffen road and drove both companies back onto the southwest side of the church. In so doing the enemy overran another 57 mm AT position which helped swell the mounting losses of these towed pieces. During the day's activity, nine out of the twelve AT guns² covering the roads were lost.

The situation was fast becoming exceedingly critical.

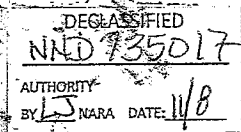
1 Sutton and Goranson, supra.
 2 Eason and Sutton, supra.



prisoners taken during the morning volunteered the disheartening information that the 3rd Battalion was opposing a force consisting of about 15 tanks and five companies of infantry. The attacking force was indentified as being from the 21st Panzer Division - one of the more elite of Hitler's armored units. In desperation Major Eason, the Battalion CO, organized a provisional rifle unit from elements of the Headquarters Company and the Battalion anti-tank platoon. Enemy tanks, meanwhile, continued to move down into the vicinity of the church and by 1500 it was estimated that there were ten to fifteen enemy tanks in and around the town. Those around the church came in blasting each house in their paths driving all before them from the houses and from the streets. By not coming beyond the church however, the enemy made it possible for the 3rd Battalion to hastily set up a perimeter defense hoping to hold for the night at least the small area circumscribed by the "triangle."¹

During the day other individuals, within means at their disposal, had also contributed bits of improvisation as opportunity afforded. T/Sgt William van Dyke, Sgt Keith Doty, Cpl Paul E. Knight, and Sgt. Floyd Best, all of Company L, chanced upon an abandoned Sherman tank which seemed to be in good condition. One of them, an old tank man himself, though not familiar with Shermans, thought he might at least get the

¹ Journal, 3rd Battalion, 315th Infantry Regiment, and Eason, supra.

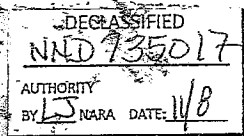


vehicle back out of danger of being captured. The others concurred. A 14th Armored Division tanker was obliging enough to show them how to operate the vehicle. In the course of the next 24 hours (up to the time the tank was knocked out), this "rookie" tank crew gave an outstanding account of itself. This action was quite typical. Both in Hatten and in Rittershoffen, troops which had previously occupied the towns had left a tremendous amount of good serviceable equipment. A large percentage of it was captured by the Germans and used against the American troops. On the other hand, like this tank, our troops managed to recover some of the equipment and used it to good advantage. 2nd Lt John M. Kuda, machine gun platoon leader from Company M for instance, depended solely on recovered weapons to make up for the many machine guns Company M lost and loaned¹ during the action.

During the day's attack Company I had become badly split-up and demoralized. One platoon guarding the Lieterswiller road was lost entirely. Another group including Capt Goranson, the CO, was cut-off and trapped out in the air-raid shelter north of town. Many more of the men were either killed or captured. The men who had been selected to occupy the shelter the night before had felt themselves quite fortunate indeed. It was an opportunity to get in out of the cold and the place looked² substantial enough to withstand a "blockbuster."

¹ Thome, supra. Also 2nd Lt John M Kuda, M/G platoon leader, Co M. Interviewed at Co CP at Bischwiller, France, 1900 1 February 1945.

² Goranson, supra. The shelter was about 150 yards long and consisted of a series of connecting rooms. Running generally

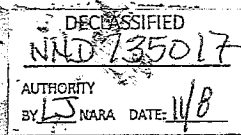


This morning (11th) things somehow looked different. From the observation dome some of the men were able to follow the progress of the assault in the immediate sector. Looking down the line from this vantage point it appeared that the enemy first hit Company L's left flank with tanks and overran the line. Enemy tanks and infantry hit I Company's right flank almost simultaneously and folding it back, went on through into the town. The procession of enemy vehicles came up in order: first a tank on which 6 or 7 infantry men rode and then a half-track loaded with infantry. The first tank to break through turned about on the Leiterwiller road and fired several rounds in the direction of Leiterswiller as a warning for troops¹ in that direction not to try to follow down the road.

Lt. Kuda, machine gun platoon leader from Company M, had a CP in the shelter also. He was first made aware of the attack about 0700 while making an hourly tour of his positions. He saw the enemy sweep down on the Leiterswiller road and overrun the anti-tank gun position~~x~~ there. The crew~~x~~ manning them *it managed* to fire one round before beating a hasty retreat back into the town. *Corrected per Ind. 26 June 45 JFB*
~~appeared to be asleep.~~ Small arms and tank fire was making

parallel to the Leiterswiller road, it had three entrances - one at either end and one near the middle. One of the end entrances was set into the face of a sheer cut along the side of the road. At the other end another entrance led in a roundabout manner to a large room atop of which was set a cupola or observation dome. In this room Capt Goranson had an advance CP group consisting of himself and four men. Between the shelter and his rear CP, Goranson had a sound power system installed. Lt. Kuda was also using the shelter as a CP for his machine gun platoon.

¹ Goranson, supra.

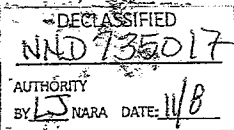


standing out in the open rather unhealthy; Kuda headed for the aid-raid shelter, not a moment too soon for, like an avalanche,¹ the enemy swept in all around.

The impetus of the onrushing wave carried the tanks and troops carriers right on by the shelter. Perhaps with a feeling of having missed something important, two of the tanks swung around in the wake, and, accompanied by foot-troops, cautiously stalked back toward the structure firing their machine guns and '88s as they came. Over ~~his~~^{Company I's Goranson and} SCR 300, Kuda frantically called ^{Corrected per Ind 26 June '45} for smoke to slow down the assault. The control room with the ^{AB} observation dome became too hot to stay in. Because of the circuitous entry corridor, shells could not come directly into the room, but regardless a "Jerry" tank and machine guns were firing right into the doorway. One tank came up close enough to stick its snout right into the doorway, but unexplainably enough, it did not fire. With tanks on all sides and one still down on the road, the group in the shelter had no choice but to stay there. To be doubly sure the "Jerry's" stationed an M-V right at the center entrance. There, even ~~it~~ after the others left, it remained for a long time. Inside the radios

¹ Kuda stated that the AT positions were manned by 242nd Infantrymen. ~~Inasmuch as Col. Eason made no mention of the 242nd Infantry in this connection, Kuda may have been in error. They were probably Regiment or 3rd Battalions guns and the men were possibly of the 1st platoon of Company I which as later shown were captured.~~

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26 June '45
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were busy. The "jerry" enemy tank crew could not help knowing it and could have easily "jammed" them up, but made no attempt to do so.¹

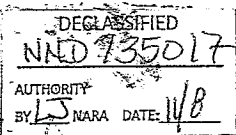
Capt. Goranson and

During the course of the assault, Lt. Kuda, played a considerable part by calling artillery fire in and around the position. A number of times during the day he called for fire on points a mere few yards from the shelter and on one particular occasion, when an infantry and tank combination seemed to be preparing to rush the strong point, ~~he called~~ several rounds ^{were called for} right on the structure. It jarred things up a bit and caused a few of the men to "black out" but the sturdy shelter stood up under it all. It was during this attack, when all lives seemed to hang in the balance, that Kuda ordered all equipment not in use destroyed. Three tanks were sent up to the vicinity about noon to cover the Leiterswiller road which had gone undefended since the AT position had been overrun there. To those inside the shelter the armor had a very salutary effect.²

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From time to time it was possible to drag some of the wounded men from the outside into the shelter. Other walking wounded came in. Some of Kuda's machine gun crews had sought refuge in the shelter. To eliminate some of the confusion Kuda decided to organize things. One or two rooms were set aside as sick bays into which all of the wounded were placed and cared for. One room was designated as an operations CP; another as a latrine,

¹ Kuda and Goranson, supra.
² Kuda, supra.



and even one as a lounging room and kitchen where men might
munch their "K" rations.¹

Although it was possible to find positions for them in the shelter, Kuda did not set up his machine guns because there was no ammunition. In addition, two of his machine gunners were in the shelter seriously wounded. Pvt. Martin Tunnickliff was there blinded by a shot through the head. Pvt Leo Smith also had a bad injury.² Once in a while a bazooka crew would fire on a tank. At one point during the early stages of the attack Sgt Griffan, out of three well placed shots, got a tank and a personnel carrier.³

Late in the afternoon as it began to get quite dark, the enemy activity subsided appreciably. parties were sent out to recover the wounded and dead. very few indeed, were to be found. True to form the Germans had already taken care of this detail, recovering our wounded and dead as well as their own.⁴ A furtive search of the foxholes was made in vain in spite of the fact that earlier in the day a large percentage of them must have contained dead or helpless liveing.⁵

Around 2000, when Kuda and Goranson were trying to figure out the best way of withdrawing, a patrol from the 242nd

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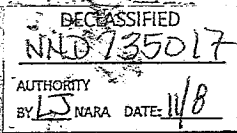
1 Ibid.

2 Ibid.

3 Goranson, supra. Although Kuda had earlier made a point of his not having machine guns set up in or around the shelter, Goranson stated that machine guns were set up at the entrance. They may have been his own.

4 Kuda, supra.

5 Goranson, supra.

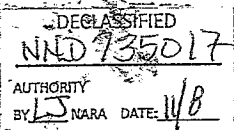


Infantry passed by and reported that there seemed to be no enemy troops in the vicinity. Leaving a couple of his men in the shelter to take care of the wounded, Kuda took a party and set out in search of his unit. Trying to gain entrance into the town from the north he ran into an enemy patrol near the point where the Leiterswiller road leads into the town. Outmaneuvering the "jerry", the party was able to make a successful ¹ getaway.

Arriving in town, Kuda reported to Company M CP about 2200. Capt Yeager, his CO, told him to occupy buildings filling the gap between the houses occupied by M and K Companies on the main street (the Kuhlendorf road). Very soon he found ² positions for his guns and got all set to start operating anew. Capt Goranson, having worked his way out of the shelter, went to the ^{Battalion} ~~Regimental~~ CP at about 2330 and reported that there were still a number of men out in the shelter and that the platoon of tanks was still covering the Leiterswiller road. A carrying party was organized to bring in the wounded. ~~while Goranson was gone,~~ *Corrected per Ind. Adm. 11/8*
 A two man patrol consisting of Pfc's Joe E. Salano and George J. Gordon, which ^{had accompanied} ~~Goranson had sent out about two hours earlier~~ with the mission of finding friendly troops and obtaining the password, ^{reported} ~~returned with the information~~ that a friendly tank was about to pull out of the area. Accompanied by the departing tank, about 20 men, including walking wounded and litter cases, left the

¹ Kuda, supra.

² Goranson, supra.



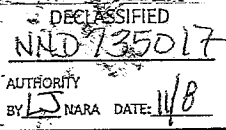
air raid shelter and, circling around to the north, entered the town of Rittershoffen from the west. After reporting¹ to the Battalion CP, Goranson found billets for the men.

With the exception of four men: S/Sgt Charles J. Clotise, Pfc. Rogve Rodriguez, Pvt. William S. Phillips, and Pvt. Alen J. Macgrew, CO I lost one whole platoon that morning. The men were supporting a road block previously mentioned, just at the edge of town on the Leiterswiller road. One squad was on the road block; the remainder of the platoon in a nearby house. The attack came to them in the form of about thirty foot-troops and a German tank which, held up by the road block, started firing into the platoon CP. The squads inside the CP ran out and into the next adjoining house which immediately started burning from tank fire. In the ensuing confusion, the block was overrun and all of the platoon, including the platoon sergeant, Sgt. Clotise, was captured. Rodriguez,² Phillips, and Macgrew managed to escape.

Taking the prisoners to a house, which Sgt Clotise thought to be in the southeast part of town, the Germans gave them straw to sit on and an English speaking doctor administered to the wounded. Clotise observed that there were a number of Company L men in the group. After about a half an hour, under the guard of one officer and two enlisted men, the prisoners

¹ Goranson, supra.

² S/Sgt Charles J. Clotise, Co I, interviewed at Co CP at Bischwiller, France, 2200, 1 February 1945.

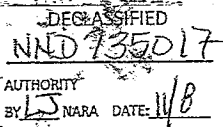


were lined up in a column of two's and started off across the battle field in the direction of Hatten. About half way to Hatten, a "Jerry" soldier up ahead was heard to be calling for help saying that he was wounded. Stopping the column, the German officer took five American soldiers (including a medic from Company L) from the end of the line and started out to the German soldier's assistance. At this point the purportedly wounded "Jerry" opened up with a machine gun. The whole column including the German guards hit the ground, but still the maniac kept spraying them. This lasted for about five minutes. Daring to run his head to look around Clotise found himself staring up into the face of a German tanker standing in the turret of his tank. The latter was making gestures as if he meant for those still alive to take refuge behind his vehicle. No one dared move, however, because that only brought another burst from the hill.¹

Satisfied apparently that his victims were all dead, the mad machine gunner eventually left his position, but still Clotise did not move. From 0900-1700 during the day of the 11th, he lay there in the snow as if dead. After dark when he thought it safe to move a bit, he found that Sgt. Dale Courtney from Company L was lying at his feet and still alive. Together, with "Jerry" tanks as close as 50 yards, they planned their escape.²

¹ This does not jibe with Silverman's account which follows. Silverman, in his statement, reports that the group was machine gunned from a tank.

² Ibid.



putting snow on each others' backs, they inched slowly and painfully over the snow covered ground. Crawling around above Rittershoffen they completely circled the north part of the town. Once when the "jerries" put up some flares they got caught in the light and a machine gun was turned on them. The chatter ~~dized~~ away with the falling of the flare and, after remaining motionless for what seemed like an eternity, Clorise and Courtney started moving forward again guiding on friendly artillery flashes. Sometime later they stopped again when an enemy patrol passed within 75 yards.¹

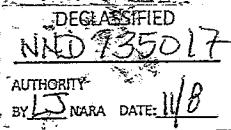
Across the snow lit ground in the early morning hours of the 12th, Clorise and Courtney could see men digging foxholes. Not knowing whether to shout for joy, or surrender to the enemy once more their exhausted and half-frozen bodies, they continued to creep on. Soon there was no doubt; they were American troops.²

Three men from Company L who played dead out on the battlefield that day were not so fortunate in finding their way back. The following letter in its stark, realistic, straight forward simplicity tells the tragic story much better than it could ever be related by another.

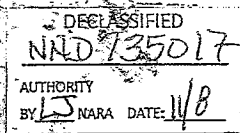
"I don't know how many of you are left or who to address this to individually but I imagine that who ever receives it will read it to the other boys.

"The day we were in our holes on the outpost, there

1 Ibid.
2 Ibid.



was Berry, Mitchel, Shatney, Southerland, Stroops, and myself (Silverman). When they started to attack they set the first house on fire making it impossible for us to use that way to get back to the company. We stood in our holes until Berry, noticing tanks moving to our rear, ordered us to take off to our rear towards I Company's sector. We got there and were told by one of their men to stay in the cellar there since the way back to our CP was blocked by 88's and MG's. They said when they made a break for it they would call us too. About 30 minutes later a tank (Jerry) which parked out side our building moved down the street. The men from I Company called us and we tried to make a break. We finally ended up in a barn where after being surrounded, we gave up. The Jerry Infantrymen who captured us (28) were very decent and after taking our ammo and weapons (didn't touch watches or wallets) took us to an inclosure where we saw they had about 34 other men from I Company captured. They then started to march us over the field towards the town ahead. There was a total of about 60 GI's. We marched about 800 to 1000 yards when they heard a Jerry yelling for a medic. They picked 4 men for litter bearers plus one of our aid men (I Company) and took off to get the wounded Jerry. In the mean time we being lined up in groups of 3's were told to start marching. I noticed two large tanks in the vicinity. One about 15 yards to our rear and the other about 150 yards to right front. Just as we started to march, the tank to our right front (150 yards away) opened up on us with his machine guns. Those that weren't hit immediately hit the ground and tried to crawl down the nearby embankment. However, very few if any to my knowledge got very far. They must have fired 1000 rounds before they quit, only to start throwing 88's in the group of bodies. I didn't get hit by the MG's but a piece of 88 got me in the back. A few minutes later our own artillery shell got me in the left thigh, (through and through) knee, both hands (not bad) and a few pieces in my head. About an hour later I saw a tank coming towards us (I think the same one) and just missed my head with his tracks. He scraped the paint off my helmet. I did notice however that he'd run over the legs of the man next to me who I'm sure was Parker. Parker was dead already, fortunately, and did not suffer further. At dusk I crawled to a shell hole about 50 yards to my front and found three of I Company's men and Shatney already in it. Shatney had both legs broken at the shins. I stayed there for two days and on the second night to my surprise Mitchel and Southerland crawled up to the hole. They had hidden somewhere near by. "The three of us decided to make a try for our lines. Shatney couldn't move and the three men from I Company were



yellow so Mitchy (right arm broke), Southerland (shot in both legs, not too bad), and I took off at about 7 o'clock. (I think it was Jan 10). We crawled in a ditch for about 300 yards, under a terrific barrage and finally were able to get up and start walking. We walked for 5½ hours, past Jerry's outpost continuously and finally thought we would have to give up. We made a last attempt and marched up a small ravine trying to avoid detection. (we had houses on our left) I heard a shot. I saw Mitchy go down yelling. Southerland and I held our hands up when someone hollered, "Henden Hoch." We both hollered Kamerad. Another two shots came and Southerland went down. I was then told in German to march towards the road. Just then I heard GI's in the building on my left say, "It's only a prisoner." I made a dash for their house where on convincing them I was a GI they took me and cared for my wounds. I told them about the other two and they said it was their guard who shot them, not Jerrys. When I heard that I began to bawl and asked to get Mitchy and Southerland inside. They tried but found them both dead. They said the road we came up was where they had 4 counterattacks. The last one ending at one o'clock (one hour before we arrived) and they thought we were some more starting another attack. I then found out I was in a town called Hatten and was with the mortar section of E Company. They were cut off and expected to be helped soon. I stood with them three days before I was able to be taken out in a half track with some other wounded. I'm now feeling better after all the shrapnel is out.

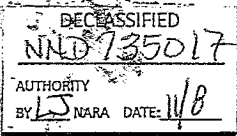
"The fellows I know were with us as prisoners are: The 6 mentioned at first, Parker, Bechman, Murphy, Ruckert and some machine gunners from the 4th platoon, Stock and Ritondo. I don't know if any got away but I sure hope so. Please let me know if you find out any of our boys escaping or at least getting medical care.

"I figured you'd like to know the story and therefor wrote you as soon as I came out of either.

"So long and lots of luck to you all. I'm at the 132nd Evac but I think I'm going to a General in a few days. I'll write again soon."

Silverman

Capt John R. Yaeger of Company M with his CP well back in the town to the west was first made aware of the attack when one of the mortar men came into the CP from where the mortars were set up in the back yard and asked for a dressing. He had been



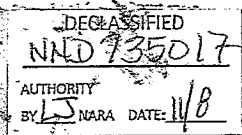
hit by a bursting anti-tank shell. Yaeger still did not appreciate the seriousness of the situation until he saw enemy foot troops, firing as they came, walking boldly up the draw which divides the southeast portion of the town from the northwest.¹

Because no call for fire had come from the outposts, the mortars had not fired a shot. As true of the attack in every sector along the Battalion front, it had come so unannounced that nobody had the time or presence of mind to warn the troops and headquarters to the rear. It was too late now. An enemy tank abruptly emerged from the mist and with a couple of blasts from its 88 drove a mortar section out of the building across from the CP which was already aflame. The CP group and some of the mortar men hastily vacated the area and moved down on the main street (the Kuhlendorf-Hatten road) within the "triangle" where the other companies had already taken up positions. About two sections of the mortar platoon, including an OP party, were left behind at the old spot. With this group was² 1st Lt. Stanley Newton, the mortar platoon leader.

Shortly after the others moved down onto the main street, tank and 20 mm fire became intense in the area where Newton and about 15 men were holding out. A rapid succession of about 30 rounds of 88 tank fire completely demolished the house in which the group was maintaining its quarters. German foot-troops

¹ Yaeger, supra.

² Ibid.



and tanks appeared to be surrounding the place and as there seemed to be no way of escape, the men took to the basement of what had been such a short few minutes before, their house.¹

Before the enemy barrage died away the "jerries" dragged up a machine gun and put it in position in the rubble of the house thus cutting off any immediate chance of Newton and his men leaving the basement. To make matters doubly worse, the lookout for the gun position stationed himself near the door leading from the basement. All the rest of that day, all that night, and until 1000 the next day activity above and the occasional periods of gun chatter indicated that the enemy was still there. After it began to look as though the status quo might remain indefinitely, Newton, quietly as possible, made provisions for some few of the men to stay awake while others might sleep. Some of the men were not able to sleep, but the snoring of some of those who could was alarmingly audible and often the guilty party was difficult to locate.²

In addition to Newton's men, there were about fifteen civilians and two dogs in the basement. The dogs were somewhat of a problem. One of them persisted in trying to go up the steps. One, when vigilance flagged, the dog got as far as the doorway where the German sentry petted and talked to him. Finally the dog turned and came down the stairs again, and to the relief of the men below, the sentry made no attempt to

¹ 1st Lt. Stanley Newton, leader mortar platoon, Co G, interviewed at Co CP at Bischwiller, France 1900, 1 Feb 1945.

² Ibid.

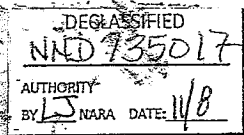
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stay or follow him. Sometime later the dogs got into a fight and together with the cries of civilian children, the resulting commotion was quite frightening. The sentry shouted something down the stairway. Everyone seriously thought that some of the "Jerries" might be curious enough to find out what was going on, but apparently they felt quite secure and not the least ¹ bit interested in what might be underneath them.

Around 1000 the morning of the next day the Germans finally decided to abandon their position. Setting fire to the rubble and, after being sure that it was burning well, the last of the Germans departed. As soon as they felt it was safe, the men in the basement began to unloosen themselves from their cramped position. Newton gave the order to start leaving. As the men emerged into the air of the world again, some of the more inveterate smokers craved satisfaction of a long denied appetite. Cpl Franklin Kiskaden reme^mbered that he had left a pack of cigarettes in the jeep which curiously enough the Germans had not molested. Nonchalantly he walked across the street to the vehicle and retrieved them. Looking about the men noticed that all but two of the mortars were still set up in the yard as they had been left. The Germans² had taken two of them and all the ammo.

Not having the least idea where his outfit was or what turn the battle might have taken while he and his men had been

1 Ibid.
2 Ibid.



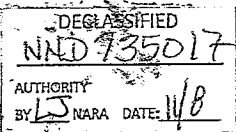
in confinement, Newton instructed his platoon to try to work out toward the road to Neiderbetschdorf. They had gotten only a short way before they ran into difficulty. Sighting a party of Germans, they ducked into a barn, but the Jerries had seen them too and started pouring machine gun lead into the barn. From then on it was every man for himself. Most of the men followed Newton, but one group including 1st Lt. Eugene C. Venn, T/Sgt Ralph D. Fischer, Pfc. Joseph P. McBride, and Pvt. Leo C. Campbell dashed back to the burning basement. Only ¹ Venn and Fischer later returned to rejoin the company.

The other seven men struck off together toward another barn. Here they hid in the straw until dark. About 1700 (12th) nearby small arms fire punctuated by a frequent round of tank fire brought them to their feet. A look through a hole in the loft revealed that American troops (68th AIB) were staging an attack up the street. Carrying wounded Pvt Francis Treanor, on a ladder, the seven men, by now given up for lost, returned ² to their outfit.

It goes without saying that the day's activity had been extremely costly. Company I lost two thirds of its original strength. On the third day of the action Company L dropped 68 names from the records as killed, captured or wounded. Company K came off best suffering less than 40 casualties.

¹ Ibid.

² Out of the original group, 16 men were either killed or captured according to Yaeger.



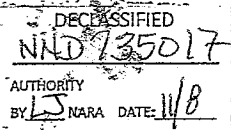
It is believed that the majority of these casualties were men killed. Very few men who were caught in their foxholes out on the line were taken prisoners. Because of the efficient manner in which the Germans recovered our casualties, there is no way of actually knowing. The 3rd Battalion took about 100 German prisoners during the day.¹

During the night (11-12) plans were completed for CCA to attack Rittershoffen as has already been noted in the Hatten story. The mission of the Combat Command was to clean out the north and east portions of the town. Among other defensive provisions, the Regimental Anti-tank Company established an outpost line to the rear of Rittershoffen covering mainly the Kuhlendorf road. The men were armed with 50 and 30 cal machine guns only. What few AT guns there were left, were posted at the CPS in the town. In the early morning hours preceding the pending CCA attack a small enemy assault group consisting of three tanks was turned back by artillery and left the town, but another force consisting of a number of tanks and personnel carriers, coming into town via the "sunken trail" (see fig 4; "Enemy supply route") along the stream between Hatten and Rittershoffen, entered the town from the northeast (160-344) stayed there.²

As a result of the strong concentration of enemy armor, the attempt of CCA to clean out the town that day resulted in

1 Eason, Goranson, Thome, and Sutton, supra.

2 Journal, 3rd Bn, 315th Infantry Regiment.



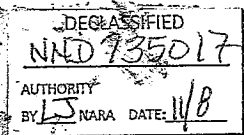
pretty much of a tank duel. Armored reinforcements came in during the morning after an unsuccessful attempt by one company of tanks to get by the church. The 68th Armored Infantry CCA took positions along the northwest end of the main street (Kuhlendorf road) and the quadrangle to the southwest. Here with the 3rd Battalion, 315th Infantry Regiment, in the "triangle", the 68th AIB remained for the rest of the "Battle of Rittershoffen".¹

Shortly before noon a pitch battle took place around the church with tanks supported by Co's K and L making the main effort. Two friendly tanks were knocked out. Considerable dependence was being placed on American artillery which, it is repeated, was doing some amazing things. In one instance, late in the afternoon, one round of white phosphorous from a 155 completely wrecked an enemy M-VI tank and killed its entire crew. Credit for bagging the tank, however, is attributed to the ingenious mortar man who first knocked a track off the vehicle with a 60 mm mortar.²

As will be remembered from the Hatten story, CCB of the 14th Armored Division, forming north of Rittershoffen, made an unsuccessful attack on Hatten this same day. This unit did not follow through in its attack as many of the officers and men of the 3rd Bn, 315th Infantry, thought it should have. To those concerned, in the little boxed-off section of Rittershoffen

¹ Bn Journal, op. cit. and Thome, supra.

² Ibid.



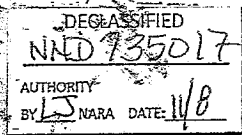
it would be a simple matter to clean out Rittershoffen if the Americans could take and hold the north ridge running between Rittershoffen and Patten and keep fresh troops from coming in. After this initial attack the CCB (especially the infantry troops) did not play a major part in the action. The first attempt had proved too costly.¹

During the night (12-13th) plans were completed for a coordinated attack by CCA and the 3rd Battalion to once more try to clean out the town. The plan called for the attachment of the 3rd Battalion, 315th Infantry to the 14th Armored Division. The attack was to be made through the town in an easterly direction with the main body of the 68th AIRBn on the left of the 3rd Battalion and one company on the right. The main effort would be down the main street past the church. Company K would be on the left of the line with L on the right. I Company would be held in reserve.²

The prearranged friendly artillery barrage lifted at 0700. It was then that 1st Lt. Earnest L. Shelton, Co L, started out with his platoon with the mission of gaining and cleaning out the church. It was just before daylight and the platoon, going around to the right (southeast) side of the church, was able to negotiate the short distance without any opposition. The plan succeeded to the extent that the patrol got two men into the church from which they were chased by machine gun fire from

¹ Wahl, Eason, and Goranson, supra.

² Bn Journal, op. cit. and Eason, supra.



the inside. One man of the patrol was killed and Lt. Shelton¹ slightly wounded.

All day and until noon of the 15th the battle at the church was a continuous action which "see-sawed" back and forth. Around 1000 of the 13th, 1st. Lt. Robert J. Garguli of the weapons platoon, Company K, succeeded in getting his two sections of machine guns across the street (Kuhlendorf road about 200 yards northwest of the church). Trying to work down towards the church from that point, he began flushing the enemy out of the buildings covering the approach to the church.²

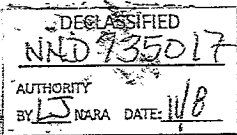
Lt. Garguli was able to maintain his position in the vicinity just northwest of the church until early that night. About 1800, he withdrew and reported back to the K Company CP. During the day he had been able to evaluate the situation and believed it impossible to go on beyond the church until the structure was reduced. He reported that the enemy was using the church as a strong point which was affording protection for a large number of enemy troops. During artillery barrages they would all go inside the church using a back entrance. In addition enemy troops were also holding out behind the church in a building so massive and so well constructed that artillery shells seemed not to phase it.³ (See fig. 9.)

In the meantime the 1st platoon of Company K under 1st.

¹ Thome, supra.

² Bn Journal, op. cit.

³ Bn Journal, op. cit.

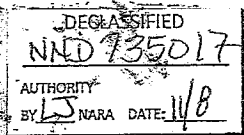


THE CHURCH AND CEMETARY AT RITTERSHOFFEN



Looking across the Northwest tip of the cemetery towards the the church. Only the nave is left. The front has been nearly battered to the ground. The fortress-like structure behind the church still appears to be reasonably intact however.

Fig. 8.



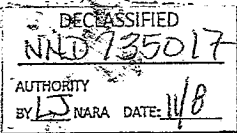
Lt -- Pry and Sgt. Francis J. Rabish staged an assault supported by the remainder of the company and Company L. In the course of the afternoon's maneuvering Pry got into position to take over the area yielded by Garguli later that night. During this effort company K was hit time and time again by enemy thrusts but refused to withdraw.¹

In the meantime the mortar section from Company M and the Bn Hq Co had established a line on the left of Company K to tie in with the AIB Company on the left. The mortar men under command of T/Sgt Robert C. Miles (who a few days later received a battlefield commission) were armed with every conceivable type of small arms, but no mortars. This group is credited with repelling attack after attack from the direction of the church that night.²

During the attack tanks of the 48th Tank Battalion tried to demolish the buildings on the street corners confronting the church to open up wide lanes in that direction. In this effort and in trying to work up into the center of the town (along the short intersecting street between the main street and the one meandering north in the direction of Leiterswiller), the armor was handicapped by enemy direct fire coming in from the northeast. Tanks also made unsuccessful attempts with Company A of the 68th AIB to circle around to the north from the right flank. This drive bogged down chiefly because of the tank fire

¹ Sutton, supra.

² Ibid.



from the direction of Hatten and the strong defensive position back of the church. During the day much tank and artillery fire was directed at the church steeple which, in addition to being used as an observation point, was known to harbor snipers.¹

In support of Company K elements across the street, Lt. Kuda, M Company, had meanwhile been able to work a machine gun platoon into favorable position. From behind the church, snipers and tanks viciously tried to wipe out the positions, but Kuda's² crews held out - that is until the flame throwers came in.

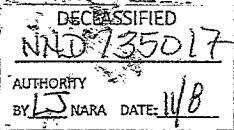
Around 2200 the enemy launched a strong counter attack with many flame throwing tanks, and undid much that had been accomplished. The preliminary phase of the attack consisted of heavy artillery and tank fire placed on our front lines. This was followed by waves of flame throwing tanks accompanied by infantry. The net result was that the 1st platoon from Company K was compelled to withdraw across the main street; Kuda and his men likewise were slowly forced out of their positions; and Company A of the 68th AIB, which had made considerable progress trying to encircle the church from the southeast was forced out of the buildings, the units had succeeded in occupying during the day.³

During the fighting one of Kuda's machine gun crews was driven out of the house in which it was set up. While Kuda

1 Ibid.

2 Kuda

3 Eason, Sutton, and Kuda, supra, and Bn Journal, op. cit.



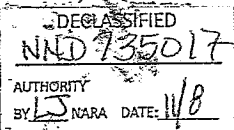
went back to the Company CP for a bazooka team to help stop the flame throwing tanks, Lt. Pry, Company K, experienced considerable difficulty in keeping his and Kuda's men from bolting. Returning to the scene Kuda found his men in such a "jittery" state that he ordered a withdrawal back from the building which was by this time, burning furiously. Falling back 25 or 30 yards, he drew up a defense line which he allowed to slowly drift back to the house on the main street from which the attack was originally launched. This delaying action slowed the enemy counterattack appreciably and accounted for the loss of many enemy lives.¹

Company K men were just as stubborn. Early the morning of the 14th T/Sgt Dave Babish and elements of his platoon were surprised in their preoccupation to find that "Jerries" had infiltrated into a burnt out structure just across the wall from them. The men were trapped with exits cut by a flame thrower and by "Jerries" which were making life miserable by tossing hand grenades in on them. A force from Company L was able to work far enough up the street to provide cover under which the trapped men could escape.²

This force consisted of Lt. Shelton and men of his platoon, who angered by being driven out of their billet, during the attack, set out to retake the ground. **Slowly** Shelton, followed

¹ Kuda, supra.

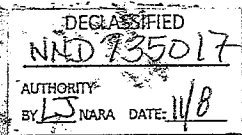
² Ibid.



by three men, worked his way into a position where he and his men could toss a few grenades into the enemy held house before being chased off by machine gun fire. That morning, when it was ~~thought~~¹ that the "Jerries" had vacated the house, a patrol entering the house was surprised to see three of them, wearing American clothes and equipment, come out of hiding and surrender.

By noon of the 14th Lt. Kuda had withdrawn to a point about 50 yards back on the more safe side of the main street. Here he set his guns up in a concrete structure where he felt quite secure. For the next ten or twelve hours the guns chattered incessantly - perhaps too much - because around 1700 the next afternoon (the 15th) the enemy, appearing as if to have wearied of the noise, dumped round after round of 120 mm mortar shells on the structure reducing it to rubble. The men inside were all buried alive. S/Sgt Joe Nutt, a machine gun section leader from Company K and T/5 Joseph R. Tillman, Pfc Walter A. Larrow and Pfc Tibor Kurircz, all of Company K, exposing themselves to small arms fire, went into the rubble and dug the men out recovering twelve Company K and eight Company M men - four of them lifeless bodies. Kurircz who, in addition to having become completely exhausted in his efforts, was slightly wounded and collapsed at the company CP. Of the men dragged out of the debris, only Kuda and one other was not injured

1 Thome, supra.



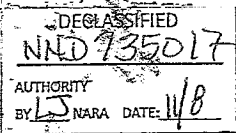
seriously enough to be evacuated.¹

During the attack Company L lost all but seven men from one of its platoons. Keeping only two platoons on the line at one time, a reserve platoon was always billeted in a house on the main street of the left (southwest) side of the church. When the house was set fire and the platoon took to the basement, German foot troops, cleaning up after the tanks, found them there. As a result of the hand to hand fighting that ensued, T/Sgt Arnold N. Roberts, platoon leader, and six others² managed to escape. All the others were killed or captured.

Some foot troops from both the 3rd Battalion and the AIB left their positions during the prolonged engagement and many were reported fleeing past the BN CP out of town to the south. These instances were rare, however. Some of the TD crews, unlike those which had done such outstanding work in Hatten, abandoned their vehicles and in one or two instances were forced to recover them under threat of dire punishment. Capt Goranson was unsuccessful in an attempt to get one crew back to their destroyer which they claimed was knocked out. ~~The next morning the Germans were found manning it.~~ Pfc. Earl Moore, Company K, apprehended one of the deserting crew of the TD set up near the Company CP and forced him to pull the vehicle back out of danger.³ It was withdrawn ^{later} ~~later~~ that night by some men from the 14th Armored Division who had been dispatched for that purpose.

- 1 Kuda and Sutton, supra.
- 2 Thome, supra.
- 3 Eason and Sutton, supra.

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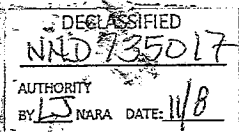
Artillery shells, friendly and enemy, had fallen in and around our troops. A lot of our big stuff had fallen not more than 50 yards ahead of the 3rd Battalion positions. As dangerous as it was, the men were glad to see the "mail" come in. They knew that it, more than anything, was holding the enemy back. According to Capt. Sutton, CO, Co K, the artillery came in "with incredible timeliness and accuracy and made the ground weave and rock". There is little question but what it disrupted¹ many an enemy attempt to reorganize forces behind the church.

All during the day of the 14th buildings in the 3rd Battalion area kept burning. The men had to fight the flames desperately to keep from being burned out of the small section of the town they held. Accepting the fact that the church and the area back of it would have to be made untenable for the enemy before making further attempts to clean out other parts of the town, most of the day was spent in trying to devise ways and means of reducing the structures. In the middle of the afternoon a 155 mm self propelled gun was brought into the town to fire on the church. Much to the annoyance of the men in the company, it took up a position right in front of the I Company CP. Naturally it drew a considerable amount of fire and caused general confusion. Round after round was pumped into the church, but the amount of damage² wrought was not encouraging. ✓

Both enemy and American artillery shelled the town of

¹ Sutton, supra.

² Thome, supra, and Bn Journal, op. cit.



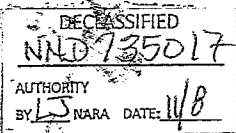
Rittershoffen unmercifully the night of the 14-15th, each hoping to materially reduce the section of the town held by the other. It was this night that men down at the Company L 1st platoon CP called in mortar fire on the area to the rear of the church. It had been observed that the enemy consistently changed his reliefs there about 1830 every other night. Three successive times in the next six days mortar fire interfered with this ritual and, judging by the subsequent screaming and moaning, killed and wounded and untold number of "jerries". A heavy price to pay for being so methodical. Shortly after midnight another barrage - this time artillery- was placed in the area back of the church and more yelling and agonized¹ screams.

About 1130 the next morning (15th) the self propelled gun opened up on the church again doing as little good as the day before. Early in the afternoon an assault force was organized on the southeast side of the triangle which, accompanied by the self-propelled gun, was to rush in and surround the church. Preparatory to the action the 155 fired several more rounds of ball ammunition and several tanks followed in firing white phosphorous. Still the enemy continued to hold the strong point.²

As a consequence a proposed attack was delayed while tanks blasted away at the church steeple in an attempt to rip it off. Thus it was thought the enemy's attention could be

¹ Ibid.

² Ibid.



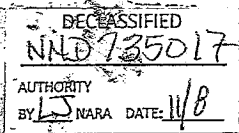
diverted long enough to get the 155 into a more advantageous position. After being delayed for one reason or another, the idea of making the attack was abandoned when the enemy loosened a mortar barrage about 1700 - the one that covered Kuda and his crew. Later in the evening the cannon company fired three volleys of white phosphorous into the enemy held portions of the town in order to start fires by which their activities could be watched, but no fires resulted. Around midnight another order came in to carry out the attack as planned.¹

In spite of all his adversities Kuda persisted in trying to find a suitable place for what few guns he had left. Selecting a likely looking house, his men went about setting up their pieces when it was discovered that the structure was on fire and that the basement was full of mines. In spite of mines, fire, and falling walls the men went calmly about their business while Sgt _____ Douglas carried the mines out of the basement. Meanwhile Lt. Kuda brought up a tank for the purpose of blasting a hole in a wall of the building so as to provide better fields of fire. Here less than 50 yards from the main street, Kuda maintained machine guns posts for the next several days.²

During the day of the 15th between 3000 and 4000 mines were laid west of Rittershoffen in a line which extended for about 4000 yards from Leiterswiller to the woods to the south. (see fig 4.) Though the need did not arise for their employment.

¹ Bn Journal, op. cit.

² Kuda, supra. ,



against the enemy, there were a couple of instances of American troops hitting them. A most unusual accident occurred ^{on the 18th} ~~the day of the withdrawal~~ when a friendly tank, forced off the road, discharged 40 of them that had been cached in the ditch. ^{Corrected per ind 26 June 45} Though the entire crew was killed, an officer riding the tank came out unscathed.¹

The 16th was a slight variation from the 15th in that the possibility of directing fire from larger artillery pieces such as 240 mm howitzers and 8 inch guns into the church was considered. This idea was ~~abandoned on advise from an artillery forward observer who claimed~~ ^{by an artillery forward as} impracticable in that our troops would have to withdraw under the shelling and the enemy could come in and take the ground. ^{Corrected per ind 26 June 45} The 8 inch guns were never fired.²

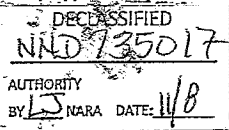
Along in the afternoon Company I exchanged positions with Company A of the AIB. This brought I down to a position on the southeast corner of the triangle where enemy activity in and around the church could be observed. Here they could take over the OP from which the AIB unit had called a great deal of effective artillery fire. In the exchange the AIB Co pulled out prematurely and machine guns from Company M had to be rushed in to fill the gap.³

Just about dark another terrific artillery barrage got under way. Between enemy and friendly shells the count actually rose to as high as 30 shells per minute. In a three hour period over

1 Eason, supra

2 Bn Journal; op. cit. ~~whether the 8 inch guns were finally fired or not is not clear.~~

3 Kuda, supra.



.600 rounds were fired into the town. Company L from its OP across from the church reported five enemy held buildings on fire at one time.¹

Around midnight of the 16th orders were issued for the next day's plan of attack. One company of the 313th Infantry Regt (a Bn of which was holding the area between Rittershoffen and the woods to the south with the 242nd Inf Regt) was to attack Rittershoffen from the southeast coming in to take the church and the buildings to the northeast. Company I would meet the 313th Co and assist it on order. Company K, in the meantime would be attempting to progress on the west side of the church. Company L would remain at the intersection and, supported by tanks and TDs, would cover the advance. This effort would be coordinated with an assault by a company of tanks and the 1st Bn, 315th Infantry Regiment, from the north.²

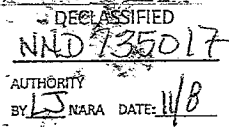
The attack failed. The Company from the 313th was not sent in as originally planned. However, companies K and I attempted to carry out their missions as ordered. The attack was slow and costly. Friendly tank fired from the group attacking from the north hampered the force attacking from the south and finally it bogged down completely.³

The force attacking from the north, moreover, fared disastrously bad that day. The 1st Battalion, 315th Infantry Regiment, which, supported by tanks from the 48th Tank Bn, was

¹ Bn Journal, supra.

² Eason, supra and Bn Journal, op. cit.

³ Ibid.



making the assault, had been brought into the sector during the day of the 16th. Relieved by the 157th Infantry Regiment at Reipertswiller where it had been engaged in mountain fighting, the Battalion had moved by motor to Hoften, a distance of about 25 miles. Closing in Hoften about 1700 this Battalion received¹ orders to launch its attack the next morning.

The plan for the attack called for one company of M IV tanks to make a combined effort with two companies of infantry. The first objective was to attack the town and second to secure the high ground north of town. Company B, 315th Infantry was to go in under the cover of darkness and to secure the buildings² in the northwest sector of the town.

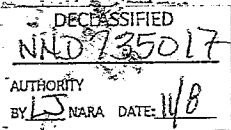
The attack was scheduled for 0600 the morning of the 17th. Spearheading the attack, Company B departed from Leiterswiller at 0530 and traveling along the west side of the Leiterswiller-Rittershoffen road entered the latter town at the scheduled time. In the meantime, Capt Raymond Harvey, CO, Company A, 315th Infantry back in Leiterswiller awaited a radio report which would indicate that Company B had gotten a foothold in³ the town.

Upon receipt of this message, the plan was for Capt. Harvey to move his company along the same route and behind Hill 178.1 (see fig 4) would rendezvous with the company of tanks, which would come down the Kuhlendorf road to meet him. From there

1 Capt Robert J. Cansler, 1st Bn Exec officer, interviewed together with other members of Bn Staff at Marienthal, France, 1400, 27 January 1945.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.



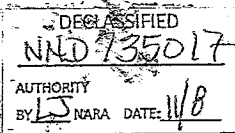
the tank supported infantry group would move to Hill 172.1 from which it could command the town and both the German and American supply routes as well. Company A waited and waited¹ for the signal, but it never came.

There have been many guesses as to just what happened to Company B. Both 1st Lt. Otis E. Bonebrake, who was rated by his Battalion Commander, Lt. Col. Ivan L. Call, as "one of the finest company commanders to come out of this war", and his radio operator are thought to have been killed or captured shortly after the company entered the town. One of the two men who went into the town with the company and succeeded in escaping, hysterically related the story of how both Lt. Bonebrake and the radio operator had been killed and how the rest of the company had been forced into two buildings and burned alive by flame throwers.² Or there is the story of the German prisoner of war who, when questioned about noon, stated that he had just come from Eberbach where he saw about 70 American officers and men being marched to a prisoner of war cage there.³

In addition to the two men who escaped from Rittershoffen, both shock cases, only two other men of those making the attack came back. These were the two company runners, who, bringing up the tail end of the column, decided to stop and rest in a

¹ Ibid.

² Ibid. Capt. Consler did not put much credence in the man's story. About 0830 that morning the soldier had come running toward him where he stood on Hill 178.1 trying to watch the progress of the fighting in town. The escaped soldier was in a hysterical condition and the next day had to be evacuated for shock. Capt. Raymond Harvey, CO, Co A, interviewed at Marienthal, France, 1000, 29 Jan 45, stated that it was his belief that Co B completely surprised the enemy. The Co was



couple of convenient foxholes and catch up with the company after it got into town. Thinking it about time to get moving, one spoke to what he supposed to be the other in the foxhole next to his. After he repeated, "Let's get out of here" a few times, a strange voice answered him back, "Nichts verstehen." By running his hand down into the adjoining burrow, the B Company man discovered its occupant to be wearing a "Jerry" helmet. The man under the helmet was "Jerry" also. The "Jerry" allowed himself to be taken prisoner without too much difficulty. In the meantime the other runner came up. He too, had a prisoner. Together they started back towards Leiterswiller with their charges when suddenly they came upon a whole column of "Jerries". prodding the prisoners with their rifles to make them run, they fled out of sight.¹

After waiting until about 1200 and still no word from Company B, it was decided that Capt. Harvey should take his 64 man company (two platoons of 32 men each was all he had) into the town to see if he could find out what had happened to Company B, and, if possible, carry on with the attack.²

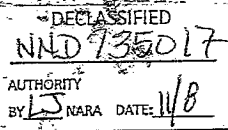
Taking his company part way down the Leiterswiller road, Harvey could see that the tanks off in the distance to the west were making no effort to come up to meet him. (The plan called for a company of tanks to meet the Company A at this point).

reported to have taken 20 prisoners at the enemy outpost. Harvey believes the Co was surrounded by the enemy while the men were preoccupied searching the prisoners.

3 Ibid.

1 Ibid.

2 Harvey, *supra*. Capt Harvey apparently did not include his command group and some others in this figure. The official figure is somewhat larger.



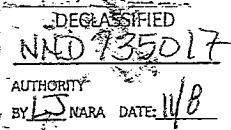
Instructing the column to hold up behind Hill 178.1, Harvey struck off across country to see what was delaying the tanks. He was informed that a whole company of tanks could not be spared. After a heated discussion, Harvey managed to wrangle three vehicles, one of them a flame thrower.¹ As the force moved on the town, it became necessary to clear a path through the mine fields and, after the tanks moved through, Harvey ordered his men to re-lay the mines behind them to guarantee the impossibility of their premature withdrawal.²

Taking stock of his resources, Capt Harvey instructed one platoon, accompanied by the flame thrower, to continue on around the west slope of Hill 178.1 and to assault the town from the northwest. The second platoon, accompanied by the two Sherman tanks, was instructed to cut around in back of the hill also

¹ Ibid.

² This is merely another instance of the lack of understanding between infantry and armored units. Concerning Rittershoffen as well as Hatten, officers and men of the 315th Infantry Regiment were vociferous and bitter in declaring that they had gotten poor armored support. They failed to understand why it was necessary to withdraw the tanks from the towns every night. In behalf of the tanks it might be said that the inordinate number of armored vehicle casualties resulting from the action does not seem to indicate reticence in committing the armor. Rather, perhaps, it was employed in accordance with principles of tank warfare which are not entirely compatible with those of infantry tactics.

In the light of cold reason, moreover, most everyone was willing to admit that basically the difficulty lay in the fact that in many of the armored supported actions, there is seldom sufficient time to establish a mutual understanding between the armor and the foot troops which is so essential to well coordinated team work. Some of them criticized the manner in which armored supporting units are continually switched from the support of one infantry unit to another. Many felt that the only practicable solution to the problem would be the permanent or semi-permanent attachment of at least a platoon of tank destroyers to every infantry battalion. Col. Eason is of the



and then to swing east across the north road to enter the town from the northeast. 2nd Lt. John W. Gregor, command the 1st platoon, made a reconnaissance from Hill 178.1 and noted some furrowed ground about 50 yards from the outskirts of the town where his men might take up defensive positions if forced to do so. He went back and brought up his platoon. As the men drew close to the town, they had the unpleasant experience of passing by a mass of mutilated civilian bodies - men, women, and children - piled up in a ditch. Capt. Harvey accompanying the platoon had forbodings about the situation and aloud made the mental observation that this was one time when he wished¹ he had a reserve platoon.

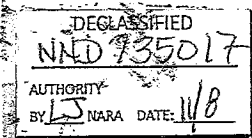
opinion that the regimental and battalion antitank units should be equipped with tank destroyers rather than towed pieces. In his experience the effectiveness of antitank units had been bitterly disappointing. As a step in trying to solve his particular problem, Col. Eason proposed to distribute the crews and pieces of his antitank platoon among his companies as permanent attachments to be employed in any manner the rifle company commanders might see fit.

The following statement by a man who was out there on the tragic morning of the 11th is eloquently typical of the average infantryman's lack of confidence in tank support. It is here repeated merely to emphasize the need for trying to find a way to correct an undersireable condition:

"On the morning of Jan 11, 1945 approximately 0700 hours, the enemy attacked our positions at Rittershoffen. The results were detrimental to our campaign in this sector. The following statements are from my personal observation of the action:"

"Our defense was established by tanks and supporting infantry. Our command had selected the best ground for our positions. I and my buddies of the infantry felt quite

1 Harvey, supra. Capt Harvey had seldom commanded more than two platoons of men for several months.



The first platoon got to within 20 yards of the outlying buildings on the northwest side of the Leiterswiller road before the enemy, who had been lying in wait, opened up. Four machine guns were pouring in lead - two on either flank. Lt Gregor, undaunted by the hail of lead, firing point blank into the two machine gun positions, bore in with his platoon and entered the buildings on the edge of town.¹

In the meantime one of the Sherman tanks that had started out with the second platoon pulled in front of the first platoon to help wipe out the machine gun nests. A hitherto unseen, captured American, 57mm antitank gun began firing on the tank and knocked it out, burning two of its crew to death. Without order, Sgt. Howard J. Stanek staged a one man attack on the 57 gun position putting its entire crew out of action with a single

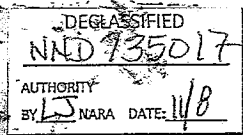
secure.

"The first indication of the enemy's approach came when we detected vehicular movement on the road to Hatten about 500 yards to our front. The morning was quite hazy and as we later discovered, the enemy had his tanks painted white and the troops wore white hoods and capes. This made it impossible to actually see the enemys approach. However, we infantry men felt that we could control anything Jerry could throw our way.

"The first indication that all was not as should be came when we realized that the tanks and units of the 42nd Div., who were protecting our flank, started to withdraw. There had been no exchange of fire up to this point.

"When the enemy had approached to approximately 200 yards of our position I heard one tanker exclaim: "Jerry is here, lets get the hell our of here." which they did. At this point Jerry opened up with small arms and his tanks strafed the Hatten road, also opened fire on our tanks and buildings

1 2nd Lt. John W. Gregor, platoon leader, Company A. Interviewed at Company CP at Marenthal, France, 1000, 20 January 1945.



grenade. Though exposed to machine gun fire, Stanek stayed with the gun to keep the enemy from recovering it. During this act of heroism, other members of the platoon succeeded¹ in neutralizing the machine gun positions.

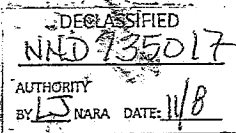
At this point small arms and machine gun fire (our guns) began pouring out of the second story windows of the buildings. From in-between a couple of buildings a 20 mm flak gun began to create further discomfiture. The end building on the street harbored a particularly raucous 50 cal machine gun. Gregor decided it was time to clear out. Slowly the men inched their way back to the furrowed ground which, inadequate though it was, afforded a definite feeling of security. Sgt Stanek, however, remained at his post with the 57 mm and Pvt Coy Wallace stayed in a position where he could keep the enemy from remaining the machine guns.²

in town. The infantry maintained their positions but the tanks took off. I heard no order issued to withdraw. We stayed on our holes until the enemy had approached to within 25 yards of our positions. At that time a Jerry from the leading tank on the road called in perfect English "They're too much for us, let's get out of here." Like the rest I supposed it was our own officer but when the men climbed from their holes the guns from this same tank cut them down. We had no protection from the tanks so the withdrawal was disorderly and costly.

"To my knowledge the enemy employed 8 medium tanks and an enforced company of foottroops against us. If the tank unit and the supporting 42nd units had stuck to their positions we could have easily controlled the enemy." Pvt J. Wesley Nippert.

1 Gregor, supra.

2 Gregor, supra.



Not yet quite satisfied to call it a day, Capt Harvey who was still with the 1st platoon, directed a three man patrol to try to work up ahead and spot some of the gun positions in the¹ houses. All three were wounded before they got 15 yards.

Deciding further effort futile, Harvey left to find out the situation over in the left sector. There he found an almost identical situation. The 2nd platoon, under 2nd Lt. Edwin R. Porter, had been unable to cross the road. Reaching the road fork, the platoon got driven back by machine gun fire from the houses. The one remaining tank was doing a magnificent job of silencing some of the enemy positions by blasting in their general direction with its machine guns until their return fire disclosed their location. Then it would open up with its² 75 mm gun.

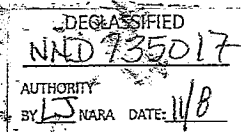
All of the men of the platoon were down in a ditch on the east side of the Leiterswiller road. The tank was blasting over their heads from behind them and enemy machine gun fire was keeping them pinned down from the front. Eight of the men³ were critically wounded.

As he had done earlier, in the case of the 1st platoon, Harvey directed the 2nd platoon to withdraw as soon as it was sufficiently dark. Capt Robert J. Cansler, BN Exec Off, who had been observing the tragic action from backoff the Leiterswiller road, called for smoke to cover the withdrawal at approximately 1700. As about 40 or 50 rounds were being delivered

¹ Harvey, supra.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

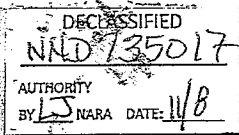


by the 310th FA Bn, Harvey assembled the remnants of his company and formed litter teams to carry the wounded. He then turned back up the same road he had come down that noon. Thirteen of his men were missing in action, many were being carried by the litter teams, and a score of others were walking wounded. In all, 32 men out of the original 64 had become casualties.¹

On the night of the 17th, A and C Companies were pulled back to a position between Oberbetschdorf and Rittershoffen. The 1st Battalion spent the remaining three days of the Hatten-Rittershoffen action preparing positions west and northeast of Rittershoffen and Oberbetschdorf respectively and took no further active part in the fighting.²

The morning of the 18th saw the 3rd Battalion, 315th Infantry attempting to stage another assault inside Rittershoffen. In general, the plan was much the same as that for the previous attacks, the most important objective being the reduction of the enemy strength around the church. Around 0900 the morning of the 18th, company K dispatched a six man patrol across the main street to see if the area around the church was still occupied. The patrol under Sgt. Paul W. Hoffman was charged with the mission of occupying the church and capturing some prisoners. Avoiding sporadic small arms and mortar fire, the patrol was able to work its way around to the back of the church from the northwest. At this point, about an hour later, the remainder of the platoon started out across the street to assist.

¹ Cansler and Harvey, spra.
² Cansler, supra.



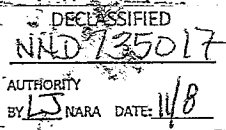
In the meantime, however, some Germans had taken up positions in the houses across the street and for¹ stalled the attempt by throwing grenades from the upstairs windows. Regardless, a few of the men successfully negotiated the distance and joined the advance patrol. Gradually the activity drew more and more enemy fire until the whole platoon was forced to withdraw and take up positions on the southwest side of the street in the houses on the opposite side of the street from the church towards the northwest, i.e. across the Lierterswiller road.¹

Meanwhile a 16 man patrol from Company I under 2nd Lt John J. Masters was sent around on the other side of the church. Working around through the orchard between the "triangle" and the Niederbetschdorf road the patrol uncovered an enemy OP which was promptly disposed of by artillery fire.²

In trying to work up toward the church north of the road leading in from Hatten the patrol was pinned down several times by small arms fire. At one point five men became separated from the patrol and had to rejoin under the cover of darkness. Most of the enemy fire was coming from the large white structure behind the church which seemed so invulnerable to shell fire. Artillery smoke shells were placed in the area, however, and, in addition to enabling the patrol to actually reach the building, the enemy machine gun next that³ had split the platoon was wiped out just about dark.

The Company K patrol, in the meantime, had not been inactive.

1 Sutton, supra.
 2 Goranson, supra.
 3 Ibid.



In attempts to capture prisoners some six or eight Jerries were killed. Finally, however, the patrol caught two beautiful specimens all dressed in black (7th Para Div), but the patrol had bad luck in bringing them in. One of the benighted "Hitler Yungen" pulled the pin on a handgrenade and, holding onto it until it exploded, killed both himself and his "Kamerad."¹

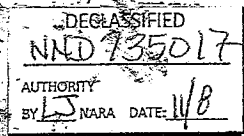
About dark, between artillery fire and fire from the friendly tank which was coordinating its movement with the Company K patrol, the pressure became too great for the Germans and they began to flee senselessly in all directions. The Company K patrol had what is commonly termed among combat troops "a field day" picking them off as they darted from building to building and in and among the trees.²

In the ensuing confusion and under the smoke Sgt Hoffman and few men were able to work right up to the entrance of the fortress behind the church - not however, without having to shoot six guards in the process. The structure was still intact in spite of the severe pounding it had taken for almost a week. To neutralize any resistance within, the men fired clip after clip through the GI blanket that covered the doorway. A few supplemental grenades brought a sizable group of Jerries scurrying out of the structure. Pfc Walter S. Larrow set out to get himself a prisoner. He succeeded in wounding and capturing three single handed.³

1 Sutton, supra.

2 Ibid.

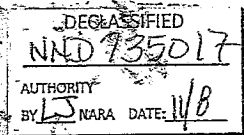
3 Ibid.



To a large degree a private first class by the name of _____ Rodrigues was responsible for what success the two patrols had in killing off a number of Germans and disrupting their organization around the church. In working into the town along the street leading from the Hatten road the Company I patrol, at one point, was able to work almost ~~aboard~~ ^{abreast} of the church. ✓ This position was maintained long enough to establish Rodrigues in an OP where he could observe most of the area in and around the church. From his position Rodrigues called for most of the smoke, mortar, and artillery fire that enabled the patrols to advance. When the Company I patrol became disorganized it was probably Rodrigues who, by calling in smoke, made it possible for the machine gun position to be eliminated and for the five men who were cut off to make their getaway safely. Smoke was also used to assist some men from Company K who got in trouble.

Shortly after his prisoner taking rampage, Pfc Larrow of ✓ Company K sustained serious wounds and was unable to move. With the remainder of the patrol withdrawing back along the street leading to Hatten, Pfc. Joseph T. Wallace stayed behind to help him. But Larrow was too big for Wallace to carry. Seeing ✓ the situation other men from the patrol, under the dubious protection of a red cross flag, came back and assisted in the rescue.

Later when enemy troops reoccupied the church, one of their ✓ first steps was to blast a hole through the church so they could fire on the OP. Rodrigues continued to hold his post, however.



The Company I patrol spent the night near the cemetery at the southeast corner of the town south of the Hatten road. This patrol action marked the last noteworthy engagement with the enemy in Ritterhoffen.¹

The day of the 19th was extremely quiet. The enemy was ~~either~~ **licking** his wounds or withdrawing troops to the south to strengthen his effort to break through in the Sessenheim sector. That day the situation in Hatten, as will be remembered, was quite the contrary. There it was believed also that the enemy was withdrawing but developments in the town gained for the period the title of "the day of the big barrage".

On the other hand in Rittershoffen it was so peaceful that an order issued shortly afternoon for all companies to fire a little of everything to let the enemy know we were there. This fire brought response enough to let the 3rd Battalion troops know that the German troops were likewise still there. A substantial amount of enemy artillery came in during the afternoon.²

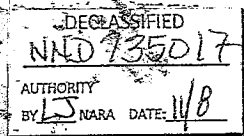
Except for sending out two or three small reconnaissance patrols there was very little activity in Rittershoffen during the day of the 20th. Mid-afternoon orders were received that the battalion would be withdrawn from the town sometime that night.³

The destination of the troops was the town of Hochstett south

1 Goranson, supra.

2 Eason, supra, and Pn Journal, op. cit.

3 Ibid.

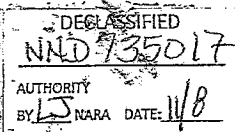


of Hagenau where a new defense line was being established as part of the program to straighten the American line all along the 7th Army front. This step was deemed necessary by planning authorities who felt the need of strengthening the Seventh Army defenses in what was known as "the bridgehead area" where the enemy was making a serious effort to penetrate far enough to encircle the American troops fighting farther to the north in the Hatten sector. Had it not been for the threat to the south there is little question but that the towns of Hatten and Rittershoffen could have been cleared of the enemy within the next two days.¹

Orders to the 3rd Battalion were to the effect that the Battalion would move in small groups to the town of Niederbetschdorf where the men would entruck in waiting vehicles. Though preparation might be accomplished, no equipment was allowed to be moved until after dark. By 2000 the units were ready to move. Company M and part of Company L had already cleared their cps, when orders were received that a "shell"² of troops would remain until 0300 in the town with the tanks.

As a consequence strong points were set up on all sides of the "triangle" and a detail of 16 men was selected to stay with the two tanks and the two tank destroyers. By 0100 the main body of the Battalion had made its way back to Niederbetschdorf where the trucks were waiting. At 0300, as per

* 1 Ibid.
2 Ibid.



orders, the "shell" moved out. Though weary and somewhat disgruntled at having had to stay until the last, the men stepped with faster and lighter feet than they had for over a¹ week.

The withdrawal from Rittershoffen as well as from Hatten was well executed. ~~Except for the one tank that ran off the road into the mines,~~ There was no ~~other~~ mishap and no interference from the enemy. Unquestionably the enemy was not aware of the departure and may not have discovered the fact until some hours after the troops were gone. In the words of² Major General Ira T. Wyche, "It was a masterful withdrawal."

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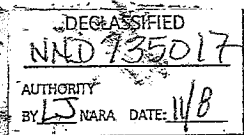
Casualties suffered by the 315th Infantry Regiment as a result of the "Battles of Hatten and Rittershoffen" were exceedingly heavy. On the other hand, the number listed on the official casualty reports as killed in action is amazingly small. This anomaly, however, is explained by the fact that because of the very efficient ~~manner~~ in which the enemy recovered casualties, both his own and American, many were listed as "Missing" according to Army Regulation even in many instances³ where the men were known to be dead.

Casualties in the 3rd Battalion in Rittershoffen were much greater than in the other two battalions. A few days after the action the total number of casualties was listed as 288.

¹ Ibid.

² Maj Gen Ira T. Wyche, Commanding General 79th Infantry Division, interviewed at Div CP at Schwindratzheim, France, 1300, 31 January 1945.

³ Capt Charles A. Riegle, Adj, 315th Infantry Regt, interviewed at Regt CP at Weitbruch, France, 1 February 1945.



On a company basis the figures were as follows: Headquarters Company - 5, Company I - 85, Company K - 51, Company L - 77, and Company M - 70. Only three of this amazingly large number of casualties were listed as dead. On the other hand, however, 178 of them were listed as missing in action. Most of those missing, as will be remembered, were lost the first morning, the 11th, when the enemy overran the Battalion positions east of the town. Although a very large number were known to have been captured without sustaining bodily injury, there is a question as to how many men may have been killed out of the group of prisoners of which Silverman and Clouse~~ee~~ were members on that fateful afternoon of the 11th. Nor can one help questioning that there may not have been similar incidents.¹

The 2nd Battalion in Hatten had a total of 168 battle casualties and 17 non-battle casualties. of this figure only four were listed as killed in action, while 57 were reported as missing. Ninety-nine had only light wounds. Companies G and H had a majority of the casualties for the Battalion with 39 and 45 respectively.²

The 1st Battalion, needless to say, had the highest percentage of casualties on the basis of the number of troops participating and the length of time in contact with the enemy. Although it was earlier stated that entire Company B

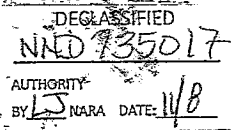
¹ Ibid.

² Ibid.

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except for four men, was captured or killed. The official figures indicate that 104 men out of an original strength of 136 were lost.¹ Company A suffered 36 casualties out of an original strength of 131 men. C Company, of course, did not participate in the action, but Company D lists eight casualties. The latter men were probably along with the ill-fated Company B.²

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- 1 The Bn Staff in its account probably excepted the command group.
 - 2 Riegle, supra.



HEADQUARTERS FIRST BATTALION, 242D INFANTRY
APO 411 - U S ARMY

2 June 1945

FACTS IN ADDITION TO THE REPORT ON THE "BATTLE OF HATTEN"

1.

On the morning of 11 January 1945, at about 0200, the First Battalion CP personnel plus some line company men infiltrated out of Hatten to Rittershoffen. Before leaving Hatten, Lt. Col. Rusteberg sent a messenger to Company "C", telling them that the Bn. CP was leaving Hatten. Lt. Bald, then Sgt., of Company "C", received the message and then contacted the Executive Officer of Company "F", 315th Inf., 79th Division. At this time a platoon of Company "F", 315th Inf. was across the street from Company "C", 242d Inf. CP and as the north side of the street was thinly held Company "F" Executive Officer suggested that Sgt. Bald clear four houses on that side of the street and hold them. Lt. Bald's group of men, about 20 in number, consisted of company headquarters, cooks, drivers, artificer, plus men from the platoons and three men from Company "B", 242d Inf. He split these men into four groups of five men each with one man in charge. Two days later on 13 Jan. 1945, a strong enemy force attacked the rear of the barn, which he held. They were beaten off with heavy losses. That afternoon tanks from the 14th Armored Division broke through to Hatten and about 15 of the men with Lt. Bald were able to move back to Rittershoffen and then to Neiderbetschdorf, where First Battalion was located. Lt. Bald and three others left Hatten on 15 January, riding medical half-tracks which were evacuating wounded.

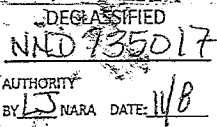
The officers and men of Company "F", 315th Inf. several times expressed their appreciation for Lt. Bald's help in a spot which they said was far the roughest spot they had hit in France.

2.

In May, Captain Duffy, Company "C" G.C. and Lt. Bald talked with a Captain in a German anti-tank outfit who said that he had been in Hatten in January and had taken part in the fighting there. His outfit fired 10,000 rounds of anti-tank ammunition in three days. He claimed that they knocked out approximately 50 American tanks and that the 21st Panzer Division lost about 45 out of their total of 75 tanks. He referred to the action there as "a very good fight" and said that he and his second in command received a special order of the iron cross for their work there, and that other units who fought at Hatten were given citations.

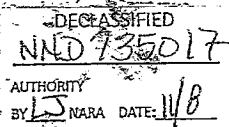
3.

Pvt. Robert Christian, Company "C", 242d Inf. was one of 26 men that was detailed to pull the outpost for 24 hours starting the night before the attack. It was the second time out there for him and meant another cold, sleepless night in a foxhole. He and



his foxhole buddie realized that something was wrong when he heard a lot of small arms fire over to the right and rear of our position about 0400. As some of it was at his rear it worried them. About daylight they were called back to the platoon CP, which was in a tank trap. There he was told by his platoon Sgt., T Sgt Todd, that they were cut off from communication with town and their right flank. They had 14 men there at the time. They had also captured 4 or 5 German prisoners of war. Jerry located their position and tried three times to over take them but were repulsed each time. Although, far out numbered they turned them back to the tune of several dead and a total of 12 P.W.'s. For just 14 men they were doing alright but ammunition was low and they couldn't stay there for ever, so Sgt Todd started them back for the MLR. First by two's, then the rest with the ten walking prisoners. The first group was pinned down at the center pillbox by small arms fire from the Jerries. The next move was to flank to their left and get over the hill. But the hill had to be crossed either by rushes or crawling. After crossing the hill, fire was received again from the MLR and one shot killed Sgt Todd. Deciding it was useless they surrendered to who ever it was and later found out it was our own men. They had mistaken them for Jerries because of the P.W.'s. Pfc Christian was the last of the first four to make it back. Several were wounded and crawled in later but the rest were dead or taken prisoners. The P.W.'s were given to the men in the MLR.

6/5/95
 Rest OK this date
 J. E. Cunningham
 J. E. Cunningham
 53



The material on which the account of the 314th Infantry Regiment's action at Drusenheim in January, 1945 is based was obtained during the period 24 January - 3 February, 1945.

At this time the 1st and 3rd Battalions of the regiment and Company "F" were holding under great pressure a sector just southeast of Haguenau. The 2nd Battalion was being re-constituted in the vicinity of Hochstatt, France. Because of the critical tactical situation, interviews with key personnel were difficult and sometimes impossible to obtain. However, the regimental staff of Colonel Warren A. Robinson, while pointing out the undesirability of conducting interviews with line personnel, were most cooperative. The Executive Officer and the S-3 devoted a great deal of time to the undersigned and made available such personnel as could be spared - these including the company commander and several enlisted men of Company "F" and also some enlisted men from the 2nd Battalion Headquarters Company who had escaped from Drusenheim as the Command Post was being overrun.

Warren A. Waters

WARREN A. WATERS
Capt., GAC

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BY LS	NARA DATE: 11/8

Unit:

2nd and 3rd Battalion, 314th Infantry Regiment, 79th Division

Action:

The loss of the 2nd Battalion at Drusenheim, France.

Sources:

Interviews with regimental staff and enlisted personnel.

Places and Dates of interviews:

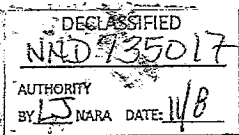
Hochstett, France 24 - 29 January

Maps:

France 1:25,000 Drusenheim 39 - 15.

Journals:

Regimental Journal, 314th Infantry, Jan. 1945.



In the early part of January, 1945, the enemy made a strong effort to re-establish himself on the west bank of the Rhine River in the area just north of Strasbourg by pushing a sizable force across the Rhine into this area. One of the units engaged in containing him in the bridgeheads that he had secured was the 314th Infantry Regiment of the 79th Infantry Division.

At the beginning of January, the 314th Infantry held positions in the Maginet Line northeast of Haguenau. The regiment carried out the following operation without the 1st Battalion since that battalion was attached on 1 January to the 45th Division and had left the area. Early on the morning of 5 January the regiment was relieved from its line positions by the 242nd Regiment and ordered into reserve. Relief was completed by 0700. The 2nd Battalion was moved to Schwanwiller and the 3rd Battalion to Oberbetschdorf.

However, at 1210, 5 January, the battalions were alerted for movement to the vicinity of Gumbachheim-Herrlisheim-Offendorf to engage the enemy who had occupied these towns. The route of approach was specified as through Bischwiller. One platoon of Tank Destroyers from Company "B", 813th Tank Destroyer Battalion, was attached to the regiment at 1330 and at 1420 the move was started to Bischwiller along the route marked by the I and K platoon.

Arriving at Bischwiller at 1340, the two battalions went into positions as follows: the 2nd Battalion occupied the eastern and north-eastern outskirts of the city; the 3rd Battalion the southern and south-western outskirts. An outpost line was set up 500-1000 yards ahead. For the night the mission of the unit was to protect Bischwiller and prepare to launch an attack on Wehrwiller the following morning.

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BY <u>LS</u> NARA	DATE: <u>11/8</u>

Enemy activity during the night 5-6 January was light. The 3rd Battalion reported some movement to its front, however, and eight or nine rounds of artillery fire fell on Bischwiller. Two patrols sent out by the 2nd Battalion to the vicinity of Rohrwiler encountered no enemy resistance (as had the I and R platoons on an earlier reconnaissance) but noted enemy movement and heard talking in the town.

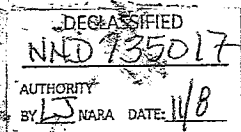
On the morning of 6 January the 2nd Battalion proceeded on the first step of the regiment's assigned mission; the taking of Rohrwiler. For this operation a platoon of tanks (5) from Company "B", 47th Tank Battalion, was attached. Jumping off at 0830 and encountering ^{light} ~~resistance~~ ^{due to the speed} by the 1030 the 2nd Battalion, in the lead, ^{capturing some 50 prisoners} had occupied Rohrwiler with its Companies "B" and "F" ("H" Company in support) while Company "C" combed the Bois de Drusenheim to the east of the town. At about 1100 Company "C", mounted on tanks, led the battalion into Drusenheim, coming into the north-western part of the town. Light small arms resistance was encountered and overcome.

*Correction
made by
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10/29/51*

In the meantime, the 3rd Battalion had moved off at 1300 from Bischwiller and had reached Rohrwiler. The plan was that the 2nd Battalion would clear the route through Drusenheim, then turn south and take Herrlisheim and that the 3rd Battalion would then go through Herrlisheim and take Offensheim. The mission of the 3rd Battalion then, for the moment, was to wait in Rohrwiler until the 2nd Battalion moved into Herrlisheim.

The 2nd Battalion, having overcome the light small arms resistance mentioned above, made contact with elements of Company "A", 232nd Infantry, which were in the northern edge of town.

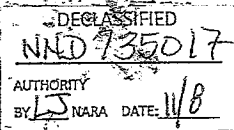
Company "C" had entered the town with two tanks and had moved to the south-east through town, across the bridge over the Moder River (159-380)



into the southern part of Drusenheim. "F" Company, which had followed "G" Company from Rehwiller into Drusenheim on foot, was prevented from crossing the bridge over the Moder River into the southern part of Drusenheim at once by enemy artillery fire which was falling into the area. When the artillery fire ceased, the bridge was still serviceable and Company "F" crossed the bridge to join Company "G" which by this time had practically cleared the southern part of town of the disorganized resistance which it had found there. Three more tanks were brought over; the last one to cross broke down the bridge.

Although the unserviceability of the bridge made further motorized reinforcements impossible (the river having been determined to be unfordable at this point), it was decided that the two companies of the 2nd Battalion which had already crossed, "F" and "G", should push forward on the way to Herrlishheim. Company "F", at this time, was proceeding on foot east from Rehwiller toward Drusenheim. "H" Company had moved with the rifle companies as they advanced on Drusenheim. Positions were taken up in and around Drusenheim in order to be prepared to render support to the rifle companies.

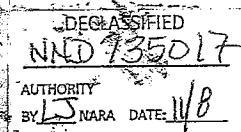
As the movement out of Drusenheim started, Company "F" was the leading element. With the five tanks, the company jumped off at 1630. The 1st and 3rd platoons led; the 2nd came in the rear as a reserve. As "F" company proceeded southwest out of Drusenheim between the Moder River and the highway, one platoon of Company "G" extended itself along the road en-bankment following the advance of Company "F". The rest of Company "G", still in the southern part of Drusenheim, continued clearing up the town and preparing to follow Company "F". Light artillery fire, 20 mm and 40 mm, was falling on the town and on Company "F" as it moved out.



The first objective of Company "F" was a factory building located on the bank of the Moder River at (149-272). In its advance "F" Company met isolated resistance groups and it was nearly dark by the time it arrived at the factory. The factory was found to contain an enemy strong point and to be protected by booby traps and prepared charges. The enemy in the factory was attacked by tank fire and grenades; after a short struggle the factory was in the hands of Company "F". In its advance to and taking of the factory "F" Company had captured two officers and 51 enlisted Germans.

Darkness having come and enemy resistance along the road to Herrlisheim being a certainty, it was decided to proceed no further that night. Accordingly, the 2nd Battalion, less "F" Company, established itself for the night in and around Drusenheim. Company "E" disposed itself along the railroad embankment in the south-eastern part of the Bois de Drusenheim while Company "F" held its positions in and around the factory and "G" remained in the southern part of Drusenheim. "H" Company also remained in its positions in the Drusenheim area. The 3rd Battalion remained in Rohrwiler and outposted the western portion of the Bois de Drusenheim. During the evening the bridge at Drusenheim, linking up the north and south portions of town, was repaired.

The night 6-7 January was marked by occasional artillery and mortar fire which fell on both the 2nd and 3rd Battalion positions. At daybreak however, enemy reaction was more positive. Preceding their attack with an artillery barrage lasting one hour and ten minutes, the enemy struck at the 2nd Battalion in its extended positions from Drusenheim to the factory southwest of Drusenheim. The terrain in this Rhine valley section was very well suited to the enemy for his attack. South-west of Drusenheim, to the factory and beyond, all the way to Herrlisheim, there were small clumps of trees and bushes which offered cover and concealment for advancing infantry. Then there was the



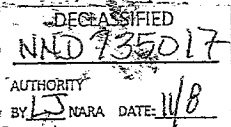
highway and the railroad running from Herrlisheim to Drusenheim (see map #1) both of which were built on high embankments. These embankments gave excellent protection to infantry and automatic weapon personnel. South-east, east and to the north-east of Drusenheim, the heavily wooded area on the western banks of the Rhine thinned out in what might be termed an open woods, but the few scattered ~~scattered~~^{Trees} and the undergrowth around them furnished all the cover and concealment that an attacking enemy needed to work his way into Drusenheim unobserved, especially under cover of darkness. Then, too, throughout the entire area there were small ditches and other breaks in the flat surface, well suited to the movement of infantry. The enemy attack on the morning of 7 January came from the southwest, generally from the direction of Herrlisheim in the strength of an estimated one battalion of infantry supported by tanks. The embankment of the highway running southwest from Drusenheim and the railway embankment were used by him for cover.

The attack first fell on Company "F" in its factory position and came from the southwest across the railway embankment. By means of small arms, automatic weapons, and tank fire, Company "F" broke up this attack, losing two of its tanks to ~~the~~ fire. The enemy withdrew to the south and, under the protection of the highway embankment, swung around to the east. He then moved in a north-easterly direction towards Drusenheim and Company "G" located there.

At this time the 3rd Battalion in Mohrwiller, in order to assist the 2nd Battalion, sent Company "I" through the western edge of the Bois de Drusenheim to the Southern edge of the woods; there to cross the river and then move to the northeast, staying north of the Herrlisheim-Drusenheim highway and attacking the flank of the enemy engaging "G" Company in southeastern Drusenheim. However, when the river was reached it was learned that it could not be crossed.

At this point the river is approximately 65 feet wide, some 6 or 7 feet deep

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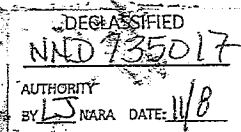


and has a swift current.

When it became clear that the main effort was to be directed against the south-eastern part of Drusenheim, "E" Company was ordered to move from its position in the eastern part of the Bois de Drusenheim into Drusenheim and "F" Company was ordered to withdraw to Drusenheim along the route by which it moved into the factory. But by this time the enemy had covered by automatic weapons and tanks (well defiladed by the highway embankment) the area between the road and the river. So it was decided that "F" Company should withdraw directly north from the factory, crossing the river by wading. An outpost was left in the factory. "F" Company crossed the stream and set up positions in the south-eastern edge of the Bois de Drusenheim (see overlay B). In as much as the three remaining tanks could not ford the river, it was decided that they should make an attempt to break out to Drusenheim along the south bank of the river; of these tanks one became stuck on the river bank, the other two reached Drusenheim but were knocked out there before they could cross the bridge.

Company "G" then withdrew to the north across the bridge and joined "E" Company in the main part of Drusenheim. By dark, the companies of the battalion were in the position shown on overlay B which, with minor changes, were the positions occupied during the next twelve days. The day's action, in addition to an undetermined number of personnel casualties, cost the enemy six tanks. In the case of the 3rd Battalion in Rohrviller, Companies "I" and "H" remained in the town; Company "I" had built up along the south-western edge of the Bois de Drusenheim.

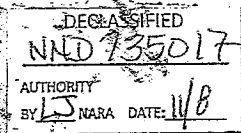
With the units in positions as described, further operations by the 31st Infantry (less 1st Battalion) to counteract the enemy activities were planned. Inasmuch as the river in front of the 2nd Battalion's positions made an attack



against the enemy a very difficult operation, the plans were made for an attack to come from the 3rd Battalion at Rohrwiller. The 3rd Battalion was to jump off from its positions around Rohrwiller on the next morning ("I" and "K" Companies in the assault), cross the river, keeping north of the highway, press to the northeast and attack from the flank of the enemy facing the 2nd Battalion in Drusenheim. At the same time the light bridge across the Moder River at Rohrwiller was to be held and a bridge-head was to be established on the southern bank of the Zorn River on the Rohrwiller-Herrlisheim road. When a suitable bridge was completed at this river crossing, it was intended that elements of the 12 Armored Division, proceeding south^{south} of Rohrwiller, would launch an attack on Herrlisheim.

Enemy activity on the night of 7-8 January was limited to patrolling. Considerable movement was heard south of the 3rd Battalion's positions. Observers reported hearing numerous track-laying vehicles to their front and judged that at least six tanks were in front of "I" Company's positions and the same number near the factory where Company "F" had made its stand on the morning of 7 January.

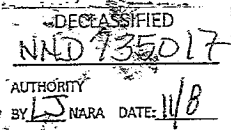
On the morning of 8 January at 1000 the 3rd Battalion set out on the assigned mission. Such heavy artillery, mortar and small arms fire was encountered that "K" Company could not advance more than a short distance out of Rohrwiller and "I" Company could not reach its river crossing. This artillery fire was followed by enemy counterattacks from Herrlisheim towards Rohrwiller. During the rest of the day, Companies "I" and "K" were engaged in preventing the enemy from crossing the river. Southeast of Rohrwiller Company "I", however, having been assigned the mission of establishing the



bridgehead across the Zorn River, pushed forward aggressively. Elements of "I" Company crossed the Zorn River by wading and covered their bridgehead from the water-works buildings (130-168). "K" Company remained in the vicinity of Rohrwiler, covering with fire "I" Company's operations and "I" Company remained in the south-western edge of the Bois de Drusenheim. The activities of the regiment from this time on until its withdrawal on 20 January consisted, generally, of holding what it had taken and of being to engage on further offensive action in conjunction with other units. Enemy pressure around the 2nd and 3rd Battalion positions was constantly felt. Artiller exchanges were frequent and patrolling was kept up by both sides. There was no essential changes in positions of the battalions, although Company "I"'s position in the Bois de Drusenheim was taken over by Company "K" on the 12 January while the former drew back to outpost Rohrwiler.

On the morning of 9 January, an enemy force struck at the bridgehead on the Zorn River held by Company "I"; although the bridgehead guard was forced back across the river temporarily, "I" Company regained its positions on the south side of the river, wading across again after an hour and a half of fighting. In the late afternoon of that day a heavy vehicle bridge was completed across the river at this point. During the next few days the infiltration tactics pursued by the enemy around the bridgehead were met and overcome.

On the 15 January, the elements of Company "A", 232nd Infantry, were withdrawn from their positions in the northern section of the town of Drusenheim. To fill the gap left by their going, the 1st platoon of Company "F" was withdrawn from the Bois de Drusenheim and disposed north of the



railroad track within the town (see overlay B). Contact with friendly forces to the north was maintained by a road patrol of the 2nd Battalion which worked in conjunction with a similar patrol of Company "A", 232nd Infantry, to the north. The regimental I and B platoons took over this patrol on 17 January.

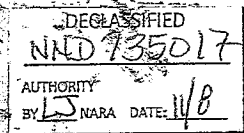
An attack by a combat command of the 12th Armored Division was made on 16 January. This attack jumped off from Rohrwiller at 0800 and using the bridges south of the town held by the 3rd Battalion, 31st Infantry, struck south toward Herrlisheim. But SS MM fire from the northern edge of Herrlisheim and from behind the railroad embankment stopped the attack; by noon the combat command had withdrawn to Rohrwiller, having lost twelve tanks. Company "L", however, continued to hold its bridgeheads lest they be needed for subsequent operations. The rest of the regiment was unaffected at this time. (The positions indicated on overlay B were held by the 2nd and 3rd Battalions).

Artillery fire was heavy during the early morning hours of 19 January with the enemy laying a concentrated fire on Rohrwiller beginning at 0115. After that the morning was fairly quiet. However, an enemy massing of strength around Drusenheim became apparent (see comment above on terrain around Drusenheim). At 1100 the 2nd Battalion reported a build-up south of the town. At the same

time a build-up was noted in the area northeast of the 1st platoon of "F" Company in the zone where elements of the 232nd Inf. had withdrawn under heavy enemy pressure. This withdrawal uncovered and exposed the town of Drusenheim to hostile attack from three directions. Throughout the day this platoon was subjected to small arms fire from enemy infantry and occasional HE tank fire. The enemy was using the woods southwest of Dengolsheim to cover concentrations to the north.

Realizing the threat to the battalion imposed by this force building to the northeast and acting upon advice from the regimental headquarters, Lt. Colonel Huff, C.O. of the 2nd Battalion, concentrated as much of his anti-aircraft fire power as was consistent with all-around safety in the north-eastern

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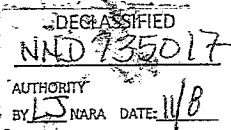


corner of the town.

At dusk the enemy began to lay heavy fire on the town; artillery and mortar. Intense automatic weapons fire came from the south of the town. It is believed that the purpose of this fire from the south was primarily diversionary, for the initial assault on the town came from the northeast. The night of January 19-20, the enemy attack struck with full force.

Under the cover of the noise resulting from the firing from the south and using infiltration tactics, the enemy assault teams worked down the railway embankment leading south from Sessenheim into the outskirts of Drusenheim. Bazooka teams were in the lead. Following the bazooka teams were at least five tanks and infantry estimated in the strength of at least two companies. First the machine guns and T.D.'s covering the northeast entrance to the town were knocked out by the bazookas, then the enemy pushed along the railroad track to the station. The tanks, accompanied by infantry, moved into town. They immediately spread out through the town with the obvious plan of cutting off the 2nd Battalion from the north. Extreme rapidity on the part of the enemy characterized this action. The weapons defending the northeast corner of the town were heard to fire only a few rounds before being silenced. Minutes later the enemy armor was in the town. The mortar positions of Company "H" in the center of the town and its machine gun positions throughout the town were surrounded and overrun.

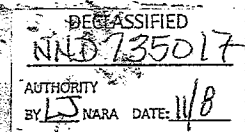
Almost simultaneous with the action in the north of the town, the enemy moved forward towards Drusenheim from the south and southeast, while in the southwest he started to thrust across the Moder River west of the factory area into the Bois de Drusenheim. Upon working his way into the woods, the enemy forces began to turn to the west towards "K" Company's positions and to the east towards the position occupied by "F" Company (less one platoon) (see overlay C). In the town, he attacked the positions of Company "G" from the



east, crossing the Moder River above the bridge site in southern Drusenheim under the cover of darkness and of a high wall just on the north bank of the river (see overlay C). Grenades and small arms were used to isolate into small groups the personnel of Company "G". Company "D", being hit from the southwest by enemy forces that had worked their way around Drusenheim, engaged the enemy in an intense fire fight and appeared to be holding firm. Upon determining the nature of the attack, the CO of the 2nd Battalion ordered Company "F" (less one platoon) to move from the Bois de Drusenheim to the northern part of Drusenheim and with the 1st platoon to establish a strongpoint on the northwest corner of the town, along the road leading to Rohrwiller. Outposts were to be left in the old platoon positions in the woods. A strong point was established (vicinity 153-164) as directed.

The enemy continued cutting up the town. His first objective was the Battalion Command Post. This was reported surrounded at 1815, shortly after the attack started. Tanks roamed the town firing their guns into cellars. Parties engaged in cutting telephone wires, while tank-supported infantry fell upon the rear of "J" and "G" companies. The strongpoint of Company "F" was not heavily besieged although two tanks took up positions on a side street covering the main leading into the town from the north.

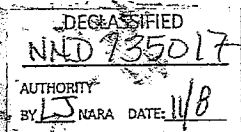
Further to the west of the Bois de Drusenheim the enemy spearhead was making progress. By 1920 enemy troops had pushed between "K" Company in the western part of the woods and Company "F"'s outposts in the eastern section. "F" Company had completed its withdrawal to the strongpoint in Drusenheim. "K" Company pulled back closer to Rohrwiller with its left flank across the Rohrwiller-Drusenheim road. A company of 411th Infantry, which was operating to the north of Rohrwiller, was sent down to make contact with Company "K" and close the gap caused by the isolating of the 2nd Battalion. This company failed to make contact and the gap was never closed prior to the general withdrawal to the Moder River line.



With the CP surrounded and fires out, communication between the 2nd Battalion and the regimental CP was limited to radio. When the battalion reported the extent of the enemy occupation at 2610, orders were issued that an attempt should be made to break out to the northwest. But control by the enemy had gone too far; he had isolated our forces into small groups preventing their organizing in sufficient strength to break out through the strongpoint of Company "F". This situation was reported by the 2nd Battalion at 2230; that a break-through was impossible. But further attempts at organizing for a break were continued until about 0030. At about this time Company "F" was ordered by the CO of the 2nd Battalion to leave its strongpoint and withdraw before enemy forces completed encircling it, too. At 0150, the last communication from the 2nd Battalion was received to the effect that a breakout was impossible. From that time on the radio transmitter at the 2nd Battalion failed to function because of lack of power. At about 0430 personnel of the surrounded CP were given permission to try to escape; one man who managed successfully to escape said that the last he saw of the battalion staff was their being lined up in street before the CP by their captors.

On receipt of the order to withdraw, Company "F" left its strongpoint and, under cover of snow squall, worked its way across the open field to the woods northeast of the position that they had held, thence to Bischmiller. Four officers and eighty-six enlisted men of Company "F" had returned that morning but the rest of the battalion personnel were unaccounted for, missing in action. Also missing were the members of ^{one squad of} the regimental I and R platoon whose CP had been in a house near the railroad station, the personnel of a platoon of the regimental A.T. Company which had been posted in the town, and the crews of the attached tank destroyers.

Correction made by unit WTS.



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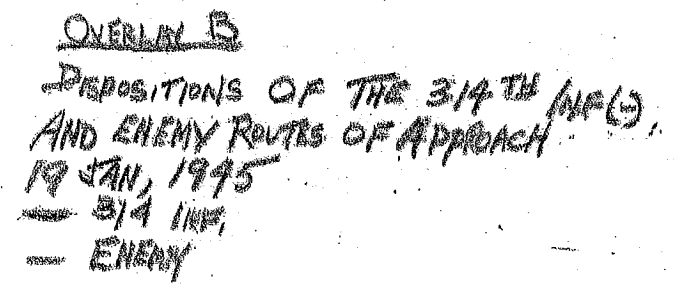
correction made by unit W.D.S.

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AUTHORITY
BY: LS NARA DATE: 11/8

Various plans for the relief and reinforcement of the 2nd Battalion were under consideration at regimental headquarters but had to be discarded on account of darkness, of the obvious strength of the enemy and the disposition of friendly forces to the north and south. But at 1115, 20 January, as part of a general withdrawal to the Pader river line, orders were received that the regiment (less one battalion) should prepare to move west to the vicinity of Birschweiler to set up a defensive position.

The above plan was carried out later that day. Here the 1st Battalion returned to regimental control. Closing in at 0615, January 21, the 31st Infantry set up a defensive position in the vicinity of Birchmiller, generally along the Redor River, the 1st Battalion on the left, the 3rd Battalion on the right.

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FROM BIRMINGHAM

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ROUTE OF "F" & "G"
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AG 1 232 INF

ROUTE OF "F" & "G" 06 JAN.
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DIRECTION ENEMY ADVANCES
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OVERLAY A

314 INF, 6-7 JANUARY, 1945

— 314 INF
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